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Andrew Levy

THE ROW TO ZANZIBAR
Thomas Mallon

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Tim Morris

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON, BOYS?
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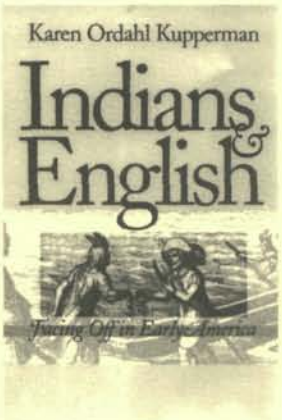

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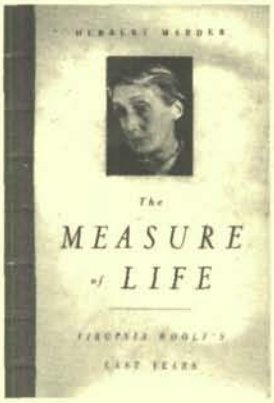

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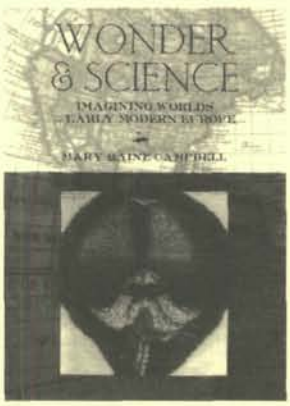

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Life is our dictionary.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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The Deed of Gift

In 1997, Andrew Levy stumbled on a brief reference to a Virginia planter named Robert Carter III, who, in 1791, freed at least five hundred slaves—more than any other slaveholder in American history. Why had Levy never heard of Carter? Why had Carter done it? And if this man had freed his slaves, could we continue to believe that Thomas Jefferson—and George Washington and James Madison and Patrick Henry, all of whom were Carter's friends or neighbors—had failed to free their own slaves because, in the economic and cultural climate of the late-eighteenth-century South, it simply couldn't be done?

Levy, who holds the Cooper Chair in English at Butler University, spent much of the next four years trying to answer those questions. He presents his findings in this issue's lead essay, "The Anti-Jefferson." On microfiche, Levy read and reread a document that, had it not been consistently neglected, might have altered the course of American history: Robert Carter's Deed of Gift. The document was perfectly legible; the looping handwriting was familiar; but microfiche is microfiche, and Levy knew that he could not begin writing until he had held the real Deed of Gift in his hands. So on one of his research visits to the Northern Neck of Virginia, he drove to the Northumberland County Courthouse, a modern brick building on the edge of the small town of Heathsville.

"It was an incredibly hot Virginia morning," says Levy. "I walked into the courthouse through a foyer full of young men and women in T-shirts and cutoffs, smoking and talking loudly during trial breaks. When I asked the clerk for the Deed of Gift, I could feel resistance—perhaps to my northern accent, perhaps to the obscurity of the request. But eventually she disappeared into the archives and came back with a book of old district court documents bearing the label "Orders, Deeds, etc., 1789–1825, Part One." The Deed of Gift was a couple of hundred pages into it. No fuss, you just turn the page, and there it is.

"I sat at a table looking at the Deed. I knew that only a handful of people had touched it in two hundred years. And later that day, as I crossed the Rappahannock River, I found myself growing angry. Robert Carter's Deed of Gift was a *great* document, a document that could have changed us for the better, and instead it had been forgotten. My rage wasn't exactly political; it was the feeling you get when you know that something important has been completely shunned."

A. F.

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

The Row to Zanzibar

THOMAS MALLON

On a shelf in my study, I keep a black-and-white snapshot of me and my father taken forty years ago. I'm nine years old in the picture, but look closer to seven, and at this long temporal remove, I can still read the photograph with a pretty fair idea of the circumstances in which it was taken. I am willing to guess that it was shot on a Sunday morning, after we'd returned from church, because there I am, standing on the back patio in blue serge dress pants and a Little League jersey.

Let's deconstruct that outfit. In 1961, I played, badly, for the Stewart Manor Golds, but sometimes on weekends still wore the shirt from my previous season with the Reds; embarrassingly enough, it still fit. (The Reds were sponsored by the pharmacy on the town's main street, Covert Avenue, and the white lettering on the back of our jerseys advertised COVERT DRUGS. Top that for innocence.) As for the blue serge pants: they were from my first communion, *two* years before, and while my mother may have lowered the cuffs an inch, they still fit, too.

The combination of these garments has more evidentiary value than their size. In fact, I can almost guarantee you how the ensemble came about. Asked to go upstairs and change after our arrival home from church—"We're going to take pictures"—I would have started to do so, getting out of my shirt and clip-on tie. But before I could change pants, I would have fallen upon the encyclopedia, into a paradise of life stories and statistics and dates from which my mother's call, or the tap of her broom handle on the kitchen ceiling below my bedroom floor, finally had to summon me.

For one six-month stretch of my childhood, the great weekly treat—more nourishing and less perishable than the strawberry ice-cream cone that followed Mass—was that encyclopedia, its twenty-two volumes purchased, Friday night after Friday night, at a stiff promotional discount, at the grocery store on Covert Avenue. Did we get it at Bohack's—this I can't remember for sure—or at the A&P, where we usually went, a block down from the drugstore? As food markets went, the latter was decidedly pre-super—a tiny, dim place with wooden floors and perhaps two cash registers, a relic of the town's 1920s origins, and nothing like the vast fluorescent expanses of postwar plenty that had already become the suburban norm. But I'm pretty sure it's where we bought the world-encompassing *Illustrated Home Library Encyclopedia*, which I've just been able to locate in the evidently misnamed *Kister's Best Encyclopedias* (2nd ed., 1994), a consumer's guide to the field:

> The *Illustrated World Encyclopedia* derives from a 20-volume set published in 1954 entitled the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Knowledge.* It was described by Padraig Walsh in his *Anglo-American General Encyclopedias, 1703–1967* (p. 82) as "[having been] . . . designed to be offered as a premium through chain and department stores and food supermarkets, and, in at least one instance, it was offered as an inducement to purchase a television set." Exactly the same encyclopedia with an atlas volume added appeared around the same time under the title *Illustrated Home Library Encyclopedia.*

Well! I'll have Mr. Kister know that we had the first color television set on our block, and

Thomas Mallon's most recent novel is *Two Moons*. He writes the SCHOLAR's "At Large and At Small" column each spring.

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that it had nothing to do with the *IHLE*: my hardworking father won it in a salesman's raffle in Philadelphia. We would never have bought it ourselves, and we simply couldn't afford the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. When my mother went to the A&P on Friday nights, it was with twenty-five dollars to feed the four of us for a week. I cherish her for carrying home those twenty-two volumes. Neither she nor my father had completed high school, though she eventually finished at night, when I was in the fourth grade. I helped her with her American-history homework, and the low-budget *IHLE* played its part.

Its twenty-two volumes were no flashier than the A&P. They had rough maroon buckram for the covers and, on the spines, dignified gold lettering with little ovals for the volume numbers. The books surely looked too serious for where they were going in our house, onto some white wooden shelves in what we called the den, to share space with board games, comic books, and record albums.

It amazes me that they survived intact. We had a casual, kinder-centric household, and in my memory we never had a set of checkers or a game of Careers or Clue that wasn't, within a month of purchase, missing some of its pieces or play money. (This was mostly the fault of my sister and her friends, but why bring that up now?) If the *IHLE* survived—and it did, without a volume missing or a single page torn—that was because of a reverence accorded it beyond anything else in the den. We used the encyclopedia all the time, for school reports and, in my case, just to read; but we understood that these twenty-two books were to be respected as the embodiment of knowledge itself.

I've just, for the first time in decades, taken a good look at the set, and the only thing to come tumbling out from between the pages has been a thin strip of green-tinted cellophane—whether a pull-strip from my father's Tiparillo packages or a shred of plastic excelsior from one of our Easter baskets, I'll never know. The only defacement anywhere is a bit of underlining within the entry for the letter "A" itself: "A few hundred years later the Greeks began to use the Phoenician alphabet. . . . " Did I do this? As part of some quickly abandoned scheme to read straight through the row of books, all the way to Zanzibar, with the goal of maximum, testable retention? That sounds like me at nine years old; the project would have lasted half an hour, until I realized that no amount of application could survive the 5,025 pages of distractions beyond "A" and "Aa" ("There are forty rivers in Europe with this name") and "Aachen." In fact, the man from Zanzibar, whom I gazed upon the moment he came home from the supermarket, remains as vivid to me as my first glimpse of John the Baptist or Howdy Doody: the fringe on his turban still looks like a crown of thorns, and his expression is as angry as his face is handsome. This confluence of eros, religion, and exoticism made his residence in volume 20, the last volume of text, a necessity; for surely, with him, things had gone, as the *Oklahoma!* album on another shelf in the den put it, about as far as they could go.

In the whole set, I can find only one dog-eared page, also in the first volume. The point of the turned-down corner rests inside the brief article on amnesia, whose last sentences in some way typify the *IHLE* ethos:

> For many years, doctors did not know very much about amnesia or how to treat it. They have come to understand it well only since World War I. . . . Fortunately, amnesia does not occur very often, and there is very little danger that you or anyone you know will ever have a bad case of this mental trouble.

Perhaps I marked the page out of sheer relief over not having to add this to the long list of things, topped by Billy McAleavey and Hell, that I worried about. The *IHLE* did not *want* me to worry—about anything. Its whole message is one of onward-and-upwardness and reassurance.

Its world is the best of all possible worlds. We knew, in 1960, that children were starving in India; they had just stopped starving in Europe, and the parental clean-your-plate imperative had been updated with new unfortunates. But in the *IHLE*, whose acronym I've taken to pronouncing as "isle," the sample children of India, in a photograph near that of a fakir on a bed of nails, are enjoying "a typical Indian breakfast . . . of rice, *chappati* (flat bread), and goat's milk." Westward across the

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Arabian Sea, but just east along the shelf in volume 12 (INS to LAB), four Iraqi schoolchildren illustrate how, in *their* country, "more and more of the people are learning how to read and write." As always, in (on?) the *IHLE*, good relations with the United States are a help: an American diesel tractor tills the field in a photo above the newly literate Iraqis. But things are bright even in the Communist world—one hears about the "fine, prosperous farms" of Czechoslovakia—and in the colonial empires, too. There is no Ghana yet (liberated too late for my 1957 edition), but the Belgian Congo appears to be calm, hygienic, and improving all the time.

If children my age had a sense that we had missed something momentous in World War II—there's the widowed Mrs. Roosevelt wearing a big corsage, on page 4159, looking just the way she did in the Good Luck margarine commercials—we also had no doubt that *we* were the "greatest generation," the one for which this best of all possible worlds was being scientifically and socially perfected. "Geriatrics is a new branch of medicine that studies diseases of older people"—and diseases, as we knew from polio, only awaited their cures, which would certainly come by the time *we* were geriatric. "Social diseases" were susceptible to their own sort of antibiotics. Juvenile gangsters, the *IHLE* promised us, come mostly from "poor or unhappy homes, and their chief trouble is lack of love and understanding and proper training." Lynching is illegal, "and no respectable person approves of it," but the important thing to keep in mind is that lynchings "have become very rare." The two pictures illustrating the article on "Negroes" are breathtakingly juxtaposed. A smiling woman at a washboard reminds the young reader that, whatever their hardships, "Negro people retained their friendly good humor," while to her right, a handsome young doctor reading a thermometer announces the race's progress into the professions ("Many are teachers and lawyers"). Like the atom in the famous school film, the Negro was Our Friend.

Did we really need such coddling? Were we really such Candides? From this encyclopedia, one would assume the average prison to be as well funded and salubrious as the average gentleman's club. Waterloo and the Somme seem really to have *been* fought on the playing fields of Eton, for all the blood allowed to spill onto the *IHLE*. And a paragraph of modern German history manages a benignity that can only be deemed atrocious:

> No people in the world have been better educated or more advanced in science than the Germans. This has been the chief reason that Germany has been so powerful in manufacturing and also in war. Germany's population has often been so big that there was not enough land for all the people, and Germany has tried to take territory from neighboring countries. This has led to wars in which the Germans have fought against several other powerful countries at the same time, and so have lost.

So overpopulated, but so outnumbered!

Forget genocide: in the mind of the *IHLE* editors, children couldn't handle so much as a broken home: "Though the courthouse at Reno is known for divorces," one caption assures, "the marriages there outnumber divorces by a ratio of 5 to 1."

The other day I got hold of the latest *World Book*, in order to make a test case of Richard Harding Davis: would such a mustily colorful figure, worth one paragraph in the *IHLE*, survive at all in a contemporary children's encyclopedia? I was pleased to find him still alive, so to speak, with three paragraphs to his name, though just eleven pages away from "Death." I browsed over to see what the *World Book* might be serving up for today's young people on *that* subject. Just about, and frankly, everything—from rigor mortis to living wills to physician-assisted suicide. One can't really argue with this—and how way cool is it to have James Dean on the page facing *this* subject?—but it's not hard to feel a certain tenderness toward the *IHLE*'s anodyne denial. It was an encyclopedia full of its own V-chips, preparing us for a world that didn't really exist outside its pages. My *IHLE* was full of noises, sounds and sweet airs that gave delight and hurt not.

At this distance, some of the production appears exasperatingly bad. Betsy Ross (in those days a mildly feminist subject for elementary-school "reports") is shown in a sketch with George Washington, as she "argues in favor

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of using a five-pointed star in the American flag." She gesticulates with a pair of scissors. Her expression is so vexed, and Washington's so cluelessly benign, that the two of them might as well be Squeaky Fromme and Gerald Ford.

The *IHLE* made the world into a costume party—young people of all nations, no matter how industrialized, tend to appear in "native" garb: the Irish colleen in her "typical hooded cloak," the Dutch boy in his wooden shoes. These tourist-board photos (actually, I now see the Dutch boy credited to "Standard Oil Co.") were, in fact, no worse than the ones grinning from the "film strips" we watched in sixth grade, but they were the least of the *IHLE*'s problems. Kenneth F. Kister calls it, in that encyclopedia of encyclopedias, "very much a substandard reference work," and I'm afraid I have to wince at the accuracy of his indictment:

> Deficiencies included uneven coverage, superficial treatment, numerous factual and typographical errors, an inconsistent writing style, frequently out-of-date articles, and illustrations that were often too small, too dark, and of minimal information value.

One point here is unjust: I would say the writing was *consistently* awful. It contains few dependent clauses (as if they were another worldly snare from which we needed protection), and its staccato recitations contribute to a sense that knowledge is strictly a matter of facts. *Who, what, when* and *where* get their due, but *why* appears with the infrequency of a substitute teacher who hasn't taken the loyalty oath. In a 305-word article on the Peróns, there is simply no *time* for *why*:

> She was very popular with the people, who called her "Evita," and her death in 1952 was mourned by the whole country. The city of La Plata was renamed Eva Perón in her honor, but in 1955 the name was changed back.

This fickleness must have had something to do with the way those "who opposed [Juan] Perón's ideas were imprisoned or driven out of the country." But since "the whole country" mourned Evita, did Juan start doing that only after she died?

We were learning to "outline" in school, making old-fashioned hierarchical arrangements of our notes under Roman numerals, then capital letters, then small. On the *IHLE*, however, the organization of points within an article does not seem to have been at a premium. Let's go to the capital of Iceland:

> The hot-water supply of the city is taken mostly from natural hot springs rather than from man-made heating systems as in most cities. During World War II, Great Britain and the United States used Reykjavik for military bases. Its name is sometimes spelled Reikjavik.

Once in a while the editors seem to indulge their own peculiar tastes. "Clubfoot" gets almost as many lines as the Peróns—though, rest assured, "Doctors can cure many cases." And one finds at least a smidgen of pandering to the targeted demographic: I don't think I ever read the article on "gland," but I have just made a vivid reacquaintance with the bearded lady and the midget in two of the illustrative photos.

And yet, how fair is it to cuff these twenty-two volumes around? Are they not still the fond embodiment of my parents' good intentions? And for all the *IHLE*'s shortcomings, did it not inform and sometimes even shock me? I still remember my first sight of the pie chart on page 4728: thirty-four million Catholics in the U.S. as opposed to *fifty-six* million Protestants? We were only number two? You sure didn't get that impression from anything Mother Virginia said during Wednesday-afternoon religion classes at St. Anne's.

What's more, in the past few weeks the *IHLE* has been educating me all over again, not so much with facts about the world as with clues to myself. I recognize certain inclinations and personality traits that it either helped to form, or that, perhaps already existing, governed my roamings within the volumes. Andorra! Its 175 square miles (pop. 5,200) became my imaginative home away from home, along with Liechtenstein and San Marino, other minor characters in the family of nations, and more interesting to me than China or Brazil. The *IHLE* had an almost biblical way of making the last seem first: as a state and a President, Rhode Island and William Henry Harrison were entitled to the same bold rubrics as Texas and FDR. I was regularly drawn to the smaller,

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less consequential entities placed amidst the bigger. (Because I was always the shortest boy in the class?) When I look at the *IHLE*'s photo chart of Civil War figures, the Union and Confederacy lined up at the top and bottom of the page, facing off like two halves of a chess set, I recall how, in school debates, I was glad to play George III and Jefferson Davis. This taste for the marginal, the defeated, the reactionary: where *did* it come from, during a childhood where I rarely heard a harsh word? I'm not sure, but it's still there, in these novels I write today about the incidental figures within great events; and it was there *then*. I'm drifting away from my subject, perhaps; but cross-referencing is a principal task of encyclopedia makers, and my trip back to the *IHLE* has been nothing if not associative.

Whatever my inclination toward minor keys, I did have a clear preference for capital letters over lowercase ones—which is to say, proper nouns over the common variety. The articles I remember are invariably the ones about specific persons and places—almost never phenomena and concepts. I can dimly recall the pictures of the little girl making faces to illustrate the entry on "emotion," but I preferred an individual's sad life story—let's say that of Stephen Foster, dying with thirty-eight cents in his pocket. Similarly, I would have avoided the presidency ("You can read how this system works in the article on the ELECTORAL COLLEGE") in favor of the Presidents.

All my enduring impressions of our first thirty-four chief executives derive from this encyclopedia. Harding, as handsome as he may have been corrupt (even the *IHLE* couldn't cover it all up), had been born on November 2, my birthday, as had James Knox Polk. I wasn't so miniature-minded as to be unsusceptible to the then-considered-normal boy's ambition to grow up to be president, and I'm sure I worried, once we got to lessons on probability, whether *three* November 2 presidents wouldn't be too much to ask from the calendar.

My interest in politics had been firmly fixed by the fall of 1960 and the Kennedy-Nixon election. A fourth-grade teacher applauded my enthusiasm in the comments portion of my report card, but told my parents that she hoped my "natural feeling for the biological sciences" would be encouraged. (What she may have been thinking of—a precocious cloakroom incident?—is beyond me.) The *IHLE* wanted, in any case, to stoke the fire in the belly of its young (male) readers. "How He Became President" is a subsectional title within all those thirty-four White House articles; but in the case of a minor magistrate like Hayes, no subhead exists over what he actually did once he got there.

The editors regarded inspiration as crucial, and I was more than ready for extra helpings of it. Take Millard Fillmore, who gave his name to the first street I lived on, in a town more modern than Stewart Manor. (Its suburban grid was so instant and sprawling that even Fillmore had to be pressed into the service of nomenclature.) The *IHLE* reminds us that, in order to save money, our thirteenth president "walked all the way to Buffalo at the age of twenty-one." Alas, with typical slipshodness, the article neglects to say exactly where he walked *from*, the lack of mileage leaving the zeal somewhat ambiguous.

The pictures have proved even more lasting in their effects than the stories. If not so thin-lipped and forbidding as Andrew Jackson, the incumbent President Eisenhower nevertheless seems a very serious-looking man, rather impatient, holding his eyeglasses in his left hand, as if he's just taken them off and is waiting for the photographer to get this over with so he can get back to work. I have always had trouble, a result of this picture, absorbing the shorthand historical Ike, all smiles and golf. Herbert Hoover, seated and shot from a distance amidst baronial surroundings, looks appropriately unapproachable for the role in which history cast him. Andrew Johnson grips the knob of an armrest on his chair as if he's driving a stick shift or, more likely, is just full of anxiety; only this week have I noticed that Lincoln is sitting in the same chair (in Mathew Brady's studio, no doubt), his hand calmly dangling from the arm support.

The power of many of the photos in the *IHLE*—Roger Bannister collapsing after his run; white latex pouring from a tree trunk (it nauseated me)—has hardly diminished, even if latter-day viewing, re-creating the sensations they induced, makes them seem like reproductions of themselves, photographs of photographs. The encyclopedia's sketches, even less

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distinguished than its prose, provide nothing like the same shocks of recognition. Hitler and Goebbels and Goering are all rendered with pen and ink instead of photography; they look like the villains in *Dick Tracy*, squashed and exaggerated. I'm unable to conclude whether this reflects mere artistic incompetence or, again, some desire to protect children. Goering's brutality *seems* to be frankly acknowledged, but the language is unmistakably that of a fairy tale: "Goering was a very vain man who liked to wear gaudy uniforms. He was also a very cruel man who liked to kill animals and to see blood." Hitler, too, lies safely locked in past tenses and passive verbs: "Hitler was a strange-looking man . . . " I remember the phrase, a sort of physiognomic warning. Maybe one could spot such a person. The two henchmen, Goebbels and Goering, are put into a sort of alphabetical hell: they're on the same page with only one entry between them—"goeduck: . . . one of the largest clams in the world, and some people say that it is also the ugliest." If the *IHLE* itself was irony-proof, it still couldn't repeal the strange juxtapositions of life itself. (Goethe was ready to redeem the German nation once you turned the page.) Alas, it would help if the editors could spell correctly: the ill-favored clam they have in mind is actually the *geoduck*, which belongs closer to the various Kings George than to those two Nazi war criminals.

One picture, above all others, changed my life—or, at least my sense of life, which amounts to the same thing. "The first sunlight photograph of a human face was taken by John W. Draper in 1840. The exposure time was six minutes." The subject is unnamed by the *IHLE*, but there she sits, in her bonnet, the first *verified* person, to my way of thinking. It's how I see her still, as someone more real than anyone who had come before her. (This idea, if it can be called that, propelled half of the last novel I wrote.) She resides in my memory with the French singer we all saw *live*, from Paris, in the summer of '62, via the first *Telstar* broadcast. Its annihilation of space meant nothing to me; the event was entirely about the surrender of linear time (the hours it would take to fly a tape to New York) to simultaneity: a partial victory to be sure, but unspeakably thrilling.

The *IHLE* turns out to have been an impermanent place. One long, boldly titled article—"Let's play Canasta!"—now seems as much a relic of the fifties as a shocking pink motel. The present-day reader can't help looking for such things: Boy Scouts raising the forty-eight-star flag; postwar/prewar Hanoi ("factories where they make fine wool and beautiful silk cloth"); the untrod Moon, which depends on "an artist's idea" for depiction of her landscape. The world—to which we were being introduced, from which we were being protected—was rendering the *IHLE* obsolete and false even as we used it. The encyclopedia's picture of the Seattle skyline came to be missing the Space Needle; Dag Hammarskjöld was soon dead, not alive; and Negroes—just look at TV—were hardly in a "good humor." At times the *IHLE* came to seem like that most loathsome and irreparable creature: the adult you had caught in a lie.

But mostly, as I grew, it resembled the clunky, embarrassing old friend I wanted to drop in favor of some new god of the baseball diamond or dance band. It would be years before I was ready for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and by the time I was, it had destroyed itself, with that horrible face-lift, into a macropedia/micropedia. Meanwhile, the *Britannica Junior*'s very name was off-putting—we could spot the condescension even in the sixth grade—and neither the *Encyclopedia Americana* nor *Compton's* ever made much of an impression. No, what one really would have liked to bring home to that shelf in the den was the *World Book*, with its shiny paper, plastic-layered anatomy charts, and color photos. (The *IHLE*'s most pathetic visual effort lies on page 1327, a color-blindness chart that's done in black and white. Readers were assured that "a person who is color-blind cannot see the number 89 when this chart is made up of red, green, yellow and blue dots.")

In his biography of Diderot, P. N. Furbank reminds us that the great *Encyclopédie* of the eighteenth-century *philosophes* displays "a very slighting attitude towards history," and that "by deliberate principle, there are no biographical articles—or at least none as such, though the lives of some famous people are smuggled in incidentally, for instance under the name of a

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place." This surely would not have been to my taste, but the epigraph to the *Encyclopédie*'s first volume, from Horace—"What grace may be added to commonplace matters by the power of order and connection"—would have suited me in my childhood as it does now. Despite the evidence of sloppy dressing with which this essay began, I was, and am, tidy almost to a fault. If my sister put back one of the *IHLE*'s volumes in the wrong place, you could count on me to straighten things out the next time I passed the shelf.

I liked the consecutive pagination of the twenty-two volumes, perhaps for its suggestion of unity—surely as possible here on earth as it was in heaven, with the Trinity—though the multiplicity of volumes still seems essential to my idea of an encyclopedia. Today I mostly use the one-volume *Columbia Encyclopedia*, and shall go on doing so as long as I have the strength to pick it up. But while it contains more words than the whole twenty-two-volume *IHLE*, it's a book in which one searches for specifics instead of sojourning; checks what one already knows rather than quests after revelation. I cannot lose the sense, when I consult it, that I'm really using the dictionary.

When I was a boy, I often daydreamed of a machine with a keyboard, into which one could type any question, and a screen, which would then display the answer. This fantasized combination of the Univac and the eight ball came to pass, of course, and one has to ask if the Web isn't the ultimate encyclopedia, a *Britannica* to the max, now available even to those families who forty years ago could afford only an *IHLE*.

Actually, I don't think so. The Web is too entropic and Dionysian; its links aren't so much cross-references as zany springboards and sinkholes. Even the *IHLE*, for all its lapses and silliness, had a certain *authority* and point of view, however Panglossian. The adventures offered on-line are less sheltered than the ones that were available to me, but the Web suggests a warp-speed world of its own, a vortex from which one might not get home before dark. The *IHLE*, like "the round earth's imagined corners," offered the illusion of a world that might itself be miniaturized and made to sit on a shelf, just like one's globe.

(Ah, but the things one can do on the Web. I've just gone searching for Albert H. Morehead, Chairman and General Editor of the National Lexicographic Board, which produced the *IHLE*. One would find him in no encyclopedia, but he yields eight Google matches, one of them a bibliography. Mr. Morehead's other literary works turn out to have been almost entirely concerned with card games. So *that's* why the *IHLE* had such an oversized canasta article.)

In an essay called "On Going Home," Joan Didion recounts the experience of trying to clean out a drawer at her parents' house, only to discover that "there is no final solution for letters of rejection from *The Nation* and teacups hand-painted in 1900." Nor, I must say, is there such a solution for the *IHLE*. I'm going to keep it, on a shelf in the little apartment I still have in New York, which has been filling up in recent years with items from the house in which I grew up: my father's highboy and the desk I used in my old bedroom. I've even got there a pair of my earliest eyeglasses, which I began wearing as soon as I could get dressed without help, and which are so much a part of my sense of self that I never bothered making the transition to one invention trumpeted in the *IHLE*'s gently brave new world: "Scientists have invented special glasses called contact lenses. Nobody can tell that you have glasses on when you wear them."

That's okay; I could do without them. I got called "four eyes" only a handful of times, and to me it seemed almost a compliment, a kind of mythological doubling. The *IHLE* was loaded with pictures of boys my age—the Dutch one with his wooden shoes, the Greenlander in his hooded jacket, the Panamanian drinking from a coconut. Flipping through the encyclopedia as often as I did, I saw them nearly as much as some of my actual friends. If we'd ever met up, I would have let them try on my eyeglasses—through which I'd met them—as the show-and-tell emblem of myself. I wonder if they and the man from Zanzibar are still alive and well tonight, and whether the actual world, if not so kind a place as the *IHLE* claimed, has been as generous to them as it's been to me.

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We met Ezra Pound at Grace Lounsbery's house, he came home to dinner with us and he stayed and he talked about japanese prints among other things. Gertrude Stein liked him but did not find him amusing. She said he was a village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not.

—GERTRUDE STEIN,
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, *1933*

Poetry proves again and again that any single overall theory of anything doesn't work. Poetry is always the cat concert under the window of the room in which the official version of reality is being written.

—CHARLES SIMIC,
A Fly in the Soup, *2000*

It is not rhyming and versing that maketh poetry. One may be a poet without versing, and a versifyer without poetry.

—PHILIP SIDNEY,
"Apologie for Poetrie," 1598

Verse without rhyme is a body without a soul.

—JONATHAN SWIFT,
A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet, December 1, 1721

The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse—indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in meter or not. The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts.

—ARISTOTLE,
The Poetics: 35, *c. 322 B.C.*

Of all things of thought, poetry is closest to thought, and a poem is less a thing than any other work of art.

—HANNAH ARENDT,
The Human Condition, *1958*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Poetry

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

What is poetry? Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is, but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON,
April 11, 1776 (*Boswell's* Life)

For what can convey the veritable brainwashing, the total preoccupation, the drugged and haunted condition which this new poet induced in some of us? We were like new-born goslings for ever imprinted with the image of an alien and indifferent foster-parent, infatuated with his erudition, his sophistication, yet sapped and ruined by the contagion of his despair. Housman, Flecker and the Georgians all melted away overnight.

—CYRIL CONNOLLY,
on "The Waste Land," in
The Evening Colonnade, *1973*

I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, "a long poem" is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

—EDGAR ALLAN POE,
"The Poetic Principle," 1845

Poe is a kind of Hawthorne and delirium tremens.

—LESLIE STEPHEN,
Hours in a Library, I, *1879*

Some [Romans] hate learning like poison, but read Juvenal and Marius Maximus with avidity. These are the only volumes that they turn over in their idle moments, but why this should be so is not for a man like me to say. Considering their claims to distinction and long descent, they ought to read a variety of books. They should be aware that Socrates, when in prison and under sentence of death, asked a musician who was giving a fine rendering of a lyric by Stesichorus to teach him to do the same while there was still time. The musician asked what good this would be to him, seeing that he was to die the next day, but Socrates answered: "It would give me some new knowledge before I depart."

—AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS,
Roman History (Rerum Gestarum Libri)
XIV.6:xxviii.4, *died c. 395 A.D.*

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I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and nothing else. I have met with women whom I really think would like to be married to a Poem and be given away by a Novel.

—JOHN KEATS,
letter to Fanny Brawne, July 8, 1819

The question of what poetry communicates, if anything, has been largely forced upon us by the advent of "modern" poetry. Some of that poetry is admittedly highly difficult—a very great deal of it is bound to *appear* difficult to the reader of conventional reading habits, even in spite of the fact—actually, in many cases, *because* of the fact—that he is a professor of literature.

—CLEANTH BROOKS,
The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry, *1947*

There were many occasions in daily life—a visit to the country, for example, or the sight of the first snowfall of the year—when failure to compose appropriate poems was a grave social solecism. . . . In a society of literary amateurs the occasional person who was unable to turn his hand to poetry laboured under at least as great a handicap as would a gentleman in the court of Henry VIII who could not mount a horse.

—IVAN MORRIS,
The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan, *1964*

A question: What poet would we most like to have construct a Heaven for us, out of the things we already have? Construct it from his way of being, his particular method of putting the world together and endowing it with consequence? . . . If the question were put to me, I would choose Marianne Moore. And I suspect that this is so because of her persuasiveness in getting the things of this world to live together as if they truly belonged that way, and because the communal vividness of her poems suggests to me the order of an ideal kind. In a way, she has spent her life in remaking—or making—our world from particulars that we have never adequately understood on our own.

—JAMES DICKEY,
Babel to Byzantium: Poets & Poetry Now, *1968*

The poet—"one who writes in measure," as Johnson laconically defines him—and the poetess ("a she poet") have always had a rough time of it in the Republic. It has ever been their endemic luck to starve, become a Harvard professor, commit suicide, lose their reading glasses before an audience of sophomores, go upon the people *à la* Barnum, and serve as homework in state universities, where they could in nowise get a position and where their presence usually scatters the English faculty like a truant officer among the Amish. But the very worst has happened to him, and in the last couple of decades. It has been forgotten in high places what he is, and every school child is taught the most godawful rot as to why he writes as he does in measure.

—GUY DAVENPORT,
The Geography of the Imagination, *1968*

I cannot say what poetry is; I know that our sufferings and our concentrated joy, our state of plunging far and dark and turning to come back to the world—so that the moment of intense turning seems still and universal—are all here, in a music like the music of our time, like the hero and like the anonymous forgotten; and there is an exchange here in which our lives are met, and created.

—MURIEL RUKEYSER,
The Life of Poetry, *1949*

All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic.

—OSCAR WILDE,
"The Critic as Artist," 1891

But to come back to Ezra. Ezra did come back and he came back with the editor of *The Dial.* This time it was worse than japanese prints, it was much more violent. In his surprise at the violence Ezra fell out of Gertrude Stein's favorite little armchair. . . . Gertrude Stein did not want to see Ezra again. Ezra did not quite see why. He met Gertrude Stein one day near the Luxembourg gardens and said, but I do want to come see you. I am so sorry, answered Gertrude Stein, but Miss Toklas has a bad tooth and besides we are busy picking wild flowers.

—GERTRUDE STEIN,
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, *1933*

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The Anti-Jefferson

Why Robert Carter III Freed His Slaves (And Why We Couldn't Care Less)

ANDREW LEVY

There is only one known portrait of Robert Carter III. He posed for it sometime around 1749 in Thomas Hudson's London studio, and when one looks at the result two and a half centuries later, it is easy enough to imagine what the painter was thinking. Probably Carter was just another country gentlemen—this one a little young, with that flat American accent making him seem more like a Scot or an Ulsterman—and Hudson knew that type, knew its vanities. And so Carter appears to us in a billowing gold suit and green cape, brown hair neatly tied back, smirking, a mask dangling from the tapered fingers of his left hand. He looks as if he is on his way to a ball, a lifetime of balls, except for a pair of huge dark eyes that suggest something else, something open and unfinished, something that resisted being posed as the young patriarch on the rise.

When Carter stood for this portrait he was twenty-one, and he seemed poised for a brilliant, perhaps even notorious, career. He had wealth: more than seventy thousand acres of New World soil and more than one hundred slaves. He had family: his grandfather was Robert "King" Carter, who presided like royalty over large parcels of early-eighteenth-century Virginia. He had arrogance, perhaps something worse than arrogance: his cousin John Page, who knew him well, called him an "inconceivable

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illiterate and also corrupted and vicious." And he had powerful friends, and friends who would become powerful: his neighbors were Washingtons and Lees, and among his friends and correspondents he would also soon count Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, and Patrick Henry, all of whom would eventually ascend to mythic status as founders of a new nation.

The mystery of Robert Carter, however, lies in what happened to him as his neighbors, friends, and peers made that ascent. By the dawn of the American Revolution, Carter had tamed his youthful excesses and was probably the richest, most powerful, most literate man in the rich, powerful, enlightened colony of Virginia. He owned more slaves and more land than Jefferson or Washington, had a larger library than either, and was so serenely confident of his social position that he lent money at interest to the former, and was reluctant to allow his daughters to marry into the family of the latter. By 1794, however, he lived alone and monkish in a small house in Baltimore, and by 1804 he was buried in an unmarked grave in a Virginia pasture. His home plantation, Nomini Hall, sits uncommemorated less than fifteen miles from the park sites devoted to the Lee mansion and Washington's birthplace at Pope's Creek. And historians, with a few isolated exceptions, have avoided all but passing glances at his life, despite the fact that Carter left behind a vast canon of letters, diaries, and daybooks.

Taken together, these details suggest that Carter is not an important figure in American history, that we treat him rightly by ignoring him; but there is one detail that haunts that conclusion. In 1791, he wrote a "Deed of Gift" that, with schedules, lists, and tables, ran for pages, and that signaled his intent to free more than five hundred slaves. In the long history of antebellum America, no one else, while living, freed that many slaves; no one even came close. No one walked away from slaveholding and slavery with as much to lose, simply gave up the plantation and moved on. And no other Virginian of the Revolutionary era—including those, like Jefferson and Washington, who spoke out passionately against slavery—managed to reconcile freedom in theory and freedom in practice with such transparent simplicity.

The mystery of Robert Carter, then, is really two mysteries: what caused him to free his slaves, and why we couldn't care less.

By the time I saw that portrait, on a postcard reproduction that the Virginia Historical Society no longer sells, it was the summer of 1998, and I was six months deep into the what and the why, the eyes and the mask. It began for me with a handful of sentences in Fox Butterfield's fine, vivid *All God's Children* that made glancing reference to a slaveholder who had undertaken the largest private manumission in American history. Butterfield's reference was so short, so confident, that I felt

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abashed: this was surely something that everyone knew, that I did not.

But I was wrong: the number of men and women who have argued that Robert Carter III and the Deed of Gift have a significant place in American history can be counted, literally, on the fingers of one hand. A library search turned up scarce, curious resources: an inexplicably unpublished Duke doctoral dissertation from 1993; a 1941 out-of-print biography that made little of the Deed of Gift, giving it fewer pages than Carter's "Agricultural Readjustments"; four pages in one volume of Joy Hakim's *A History of U.S.*, a series for nine-to-twelve-year-olds ("Emancipated!" she tells them. "That means free! Robert Carter freed his slaves!"); and a scattering of articles, mostly local to eastern Virginia, few of which added new facts to the case. Stranger yet was the treatment of Carter's manumission within the enormous body of scholarship about early American history and slavery. I went through book after book, article after article, and could find almost nothing: occasional passing glances like Butterfield's, at most an isolated page, even when the subject was explicitly slaveholders; even when the subject was slaveholders who freed their slaves; even when the subject was Virginian slaveholders who freed their slaves. Most compelling, however, was the fact that the very best historians knew who Robert Carter was, knew the Deed of Gift, and still, somehow, hesitated. Philip D. Morgan mentions Robert Carter III thirty-seven times in his landmark *Slave Counterpoint,* usually as an example of a progressive Southern patriarch, and yet never mentions that Carter manumitted his slaves. Ira Berlin, in a newspaper interview in 1991, called the Deed of Gift "an extraordinary, very, very exceptional event"; his recent, eloquent *Many Thousands Gone,* however, mentions Carter only once, twenty pages away from the passage in the book devoted to manumissions in the upper South. As a fact, Robert Carter's Deed of Gift was interesting; but as an un-fact, a non-presence, it became even more interesting. Something buried that deep must be buried for a reason, and I wanted to know what it was.

But first I wanted to know why Carter did it, and the answer to that query lay in the dusty volumes of his correspondence, so dry, so rhetorically uncompelling, that it is easy enough to understand why so few people have had any interest in them. It is impossibly counterintuitive to imagine that a song of liberty this provocative might be cloaked in such minutiae. Why did Robert Carter free his slaves, when those around him did not? He felt the same pull toward the ideals of freedom as did his more famous peers and neighbors. He supported the Revolutionary forces, offering provisions and support whenever asked. He respected democracy in theory, but made a bad candidate for public office: he ran for the Virginia House of Burgesses twice, and each time he was crushed, polling seventh out of seven candidates the first time, and winning seven votes out of 330 the second, losing to a Lee and a Washington. If he had

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been more electable, he might have ended up a founding father too, privately dreaming about freeing his slaves but unwilling to suffer the loss of goodwill from slaveholding voters and officeholders. Perhaps he was more stubborn, more aristocratic: they had called his grandfather "King," after all, and he kept that royal affect, rarely missing an opportunity to let the revolutionaries know, even after they founded a nation, that he was still better than they. Perhaps he was tired: lost amid our *Gone with the Wind* phantasms lies the fact that running a plantation was strange and numbing work, psychically debilitating, ambiguously profitable. Perhaps Robert Carter was simply quicker to the mark, not a moral man at all, but a smart man, smart enough to recognize that there were easier ways for a powerful Southern white man to make a buck.

Or perhaps this: perhaps Robert Carter was more American than the rest of them, as long as we define America as the land of the contrarians, the mad visionary individuals who spend their lives doing what everyone else doesn't do, and not doing what everyone else does. While the other great Southern men of his age married the dutiful daughters of each other's families, Carter chose a wife from urbane Baltimore society, a well-read ironworks heiress with a lacerating wit. While those men got their religion from the aristocratic, undemanding, and pure white Anglican Church (or from the pseudo-church of Enlightenment Rationalism), Carter was sure he met Jesus one May day in 1778, and asked him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" While Jefferson and Washington transformed their celebrated plantations into testaments to the agrarian ideal, Carter cast iron, tried his hand at munitions manufacture, lent money (something Jefferson and most large slaveholders would never be solvent enough to do, yet another reason why Carter was able to do what they could not), and filled his house to bursting with books and musical instruments. Other Virginian peers sent their sons to William and Mary, and reared them to be slaveholders in their turn; Robert Carter sent his children north so they would learn to be anything but slaveholders.

Out of step, out of sync. Robert Carter's timing, his vision, were so maladroit as to be marvelous. In the summer of 1776, in a letter to Richard Henry Lee (his neighbor and a prominent delegate to the Continental Congress then in session in Philadelphia), Carter ignored all civic matters, and instead asked Lee to bring "two sets of curls for my daughters Priscilla + Nancy" back from Philadelphia, and enclosed "Sample(s) of hair and measure"—as if Lee, who had recently introduced the motion to declare independence, had nothing more pressing to do. In October of that same year, shortly after Thomas Jefferson came home to Virginia after composing the Declaration of Independence and fighting for its passage, Carter sent his collection agent with a bill for an unpaid loan. The loan was repaid, the message, no doubt, delivered: you may think you are independent of the king of England, Tom, but you are still

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dependent on me. And when Carter discovered, in the spring of 1792, that his lost copy of the *Complete Works of John Locke* had been recovered, he told his agent to donate all three volumes to the Richmond Public Library. It is a small bit of business, but suggestive: I am done with Locke, Carter seemed to be saying, done with the Age of Reason. Truthfully, however, he had never been there.

Throughout the 1770s, Robert Carter proved time and again that he and his country—at least, the elite fraction constituted by his peers—were moving in different directions. He ignored the American Revolution with an intensity that bordered on the self-destructive, refusing to move even as the British army roamed dangerously close to Nomini. He joined the radical, fledgling Baptist Church and found himself the wealthiest man in the revival tent, the wealthiest man on his knees as mobs (supported by other wealthy men) violently dispersed the congregation, the wealthiest man taking communion alongside his slaves. His religious daybook for March 15, 1778, reads, "RC & his servant Negro Sam—received Tokens and they did both Comune," a selection of detail strongly suggesting that what Carter found extraordinary about church that day was the company he was keeping.

It was only in the 1780s, however, that slavery became the wedge. Carter's letters began to blossom with open antipathy for the institution: to John Rippon, a Baptist elder, he wrote that "tolerating Slavery indicates great depravity"; in a later letter, he observed that "the Situation of the Blacks here, is my greatest difficulty—It is a subject that our Legislature will not take up—& it appears to me Judgements will follow us so long as the Bar is held up." Such sentiments were, of course, plentiful in the papers of men like Jefferson and Washington, members of the progressive minority of plantation owners willing to speak out against slavery. And like those men, Carter spent the 1780s acknowledging that slavery was wrong, but also arguing that freeing the slaves was impracticable. At that moment in American history, however, the argument that large private emancipations were unfeasible stood on shaky ground. In 1782, the legislature of the state of Virginia passed the most liberal anti-slavery bill in its antebellum history, a law allowing private slaveholders to liberate their "tithables" under certain conditions. In the two decades that followed, while the large slaveholders flirted with plans for gradual emancipation—plans that, to them, invariably contained some flaw—many small and middle-class slaveholders began to let their slaves go. From 1780 to 1800, the number of free blacks in Virginia increased from roughly three thousand to more than twenty thousand, almost 5 percent of the black population of the state.

In this context, Robert Carter's act of private emancipation was not exemplary: he had been preceded by middle-class Quakers and Baptists

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on the Potomac North Shore, and he would be followed by men and women like Samuel Templeman, who, inspired by his example, freed ninety slaves, and Martha Washington, who freed her husband's slaves two years after his death, and not after her own passing, as he had specified in his will. As was often the case throughout Carter's life, what made his action unusual was that he was the most powerful and wealthiest man to repudiate the rational (and, in the case of slavery, rationalizing) republicanism practiced by his peers in the Southern gentry. What made him even more anomalous is that he did not look, act, or write like a man who possessed a single egalitarian impulse. He freed his slaves because, like Jefferson and Washington, he knew it was the right thing to do. But, unlike Jefferson and Washington, he had no civic face ("we seem detached from the world," he wrote a son-in-law in 1785), no constituency he needed to satisfy by drafting an ambivalent public position toward the institution and looking like a revolutionary as he did so.

Part of what disturbed Carter was the mistreatment of his slaves: "I do forbid you," he wrote the overseer Thomas Olive on May 8, 1781, "to correct, in any manner what ever, either old or young negro belonging to me, until I my self shall hear and consider the fault or faults that may be aledged." He delivered a similar warning to Samuel Straughan, the overseer at his Forest Plantation, on July 6, 1787: "You will remember to apply to me in Case you suppose any of the people should require such Correction." What makes these letters striking is not that Carter opposed the idea that slaves could be, in his own words, "a good deal beaten and bruised." It is, rather, that he trusted the versions of events told him by his slaves. To Straughan, he wrote that "Negro Jerry of Forest Plantation informs me that you stripped him this morning, and with Switches whipped him on his bare back yet the offense you charged him with was a matter in his own house. . . ." He began another letter by informing an overseer that "Negro Nanny cam here yesterday evening who informs me the Son Ben and Billy Son of Criss" were beaten with "(your) privity and knowledge." As with "Negro Nanny," many of Carter's slaves understood that they could run to Nomini to seek his intervention: "I beg leave to interfere in the present case," Carter wrote in defense of "Negro Dennis," adding that "he is not to be corrected" for running off Colespoint plantation to file his complaint.

This kind of triangle between slave, master, and overseer was common in the antebellum South: Thomas Jefferson's slaves welcomed his returns to Monticello because they understood that he would protect them from his overseers. For Carter, however, the actions of white overseers reflected, not contradicted, the carelessness and cruelty of their gentrified employers. In some instances, the differences of opinion between Carter and other wealthy landowners appear slight: in April and May of 1781, Carter sent two black servants to retrieve a supply of corn from a local

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granary, and Richard Henry Lee turned them away, insisting that Carter send instead "two white men and one black man." In other exchanges, however, Carter's outrage (and his condescension) are more evident, as in one case involving the Mason family and two of their escaped slaves, "Negro Winny . . . forward with Child," and a man named "Talbot" or "Tabbard." In the first letter, dated March 9, 1785, Carter told Stephen Mason that Winny had "surrendered herself up" at one of his plantations, but that Talbot had wounded two white overseers who had attempted to capture him, and "it is probable . . . he will be shot"; in veiled, gentlemanly diction, Carter then wrote, "I do advise that you give some immediate direction relative to Talbot + Winny." In a second letter, dated March 21, 1785, Carter told Mason that he had captured Talbot (who now became Tabbard) unharmed, and that Tabbard was traveling with "a Advertisement Signed by your brother Mr. G. T. Mason, which alone must be considered a full pass." Carter then added, "your people are both, almost, without shoes," and told Mason that his own black servant "Will" would deliver the two servants back home, "with provision from hence for himself + your people." If Mason missed Carter's inference that Tabbard's life was unnecessarily threatened by the failure of his masters to acknowledge that he was not an escaped slave, but was traveling with "a full pass," it would be harder to ignore the statement Carter made by returning the two slaves with new provisions, perhaps even new shoes, accompanied only by one of his own black servants.

Whatever Carter felt he shared with his fellow planters, he often felt more enthusiasm for defending poorer men and women from their trespasses. On November 10, 1777, he wrote an emotional letter to Colonel John Augustine Washington, demanding restitution on behalf of a white indentured servant who had been tied up and whipped by a patrol of American soldiers: "I do presume that a violent Trepas has been committed against a mans Person; therefore I appear on the part of the injured party." When offered an opportunity to ally himself with the Washingtons three years later, however—a proposal of marriage made to his daughter Priscilla from George Washington, the General's nephew—Carter allowed the prospective union to languish from indifference: "I am apprehensive . . . however, if herself + mother should think otherwise, I shall not refuse to let Priscilla marry." Throughout the period, in fact, Carter seemed to construct dramatic set pieces in which the crime of one propertied person was placed in relief against the constancy of one servant, who was often given the honor (or the burden) of receiving restitution. "I am informed," Carter wrote a fellow slaveowner in August 1777, "that an iron pot in the house of Negroe George Carpenter at my plantation now called Aries, was taken and carried to your house yesterday." Not questioning the word of "Negroe George," and not waiting to hear

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from the slaveholder, Carter seemed to assume that his social peer would not find humbling the prospect of acknowledging his guilt to the slave himself: "I hope you will deliver it [the pot] to the Bearer George."

Increasingly, as the Revolution ended and a new nation was called into being, Robert Carter felt himself surrounded by whites he could not trust, and blacks he could trust—or at least control. Only gradually, in fact, does the reader of Carter's massive, languid correspondence begin to realize that, for every time he wrote something like "these outlying negroes are too unruly," there were a hundred complaints about the inconstancy of his white tenants, business associates, and neighbors. In strange, symbolic ways, Carter even began to construct systems out of this contrast. During the mid-1780s, for instance, he grew furious at the failure of the "public Post," took control of the newspaper subscriptions of "Washington + others of my neighbors," and began correcting badly addressed mail: "If Westmoreland County is written on said N Paper Scratch out the word Westmoreland and write Richmond for Mr. R Neil lives in Richmond County and not in Westmoreland." Almost simultaneously, he began to use the name of a servant and his address as a kind of postmark to verify that a given communication had taken place, as if he had discovered a form of human communication upon which he could rely: "I send by Negro Dick Dr. Gill on Practical Divinity." He even began to assume that his slaves could undertake business transactions with complete disinterestedness, an assumption grounded upon absolute faith either in their narrative of events or in their passivity: "Negro Harry . . . says, that theives broke into your Mill last Night, and took three of his best bags. . . . Harry now waits on you for . . . 24 Pecks of Meal he Harry to receive three good meal bags."

Whether all of these small dramas increased Robert Carter's estrangement from his peers and neighbors, or were themselves signs of that estrangement, is impossible to say. By the late 1780s, however, Carter's alienation had grown into something deeper, something that might provide the foundation for a radical act. He had watched his wife die, watched many of his favorite children die, and was sick himself, falling suddenly unconscious for minutes at a time. He had drifted away from even the radical Baptists, and was looking for smaller, wilder churches. And while he often responded with sympathy to slaves who sought to keep their families together, he tried to keep his own children from making attachments in Virginia, sending three daughters to Baltimore and two sons to the Baptist Theological Seminary in Providence, citing his "only . . . consideration . . . the most abject State of Slavery in this Commonwealth."

What Carter learned from hearing black preachers, and receiving communion alongside his own slaves, what he learned from a thousand small exchanges with his slaves, must surely have catalyzed the Deed of

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Gift. But Robert Carter was not that simple. He spent much of the decade, for instance, complaining about his children, especially his sons and sons-in-law, sometimes viciously. Perhaps he felt that he had no heir he could trust, a circumstance that would make the Deed of Gift, which gave away $100,000 (in 1790 terms) of inheritable property, a less ambivalent project. Or perhaps he wanted to free his slaves first and foremost, and assuaged his paternal guilt about giving away his patrimony by arguing to himself the unworthiness of those potential heirs. Or perhaps he had suffered the ultimate alienation, and no longer felt the pull of family on his heart: in which case the same impulse that allowed him to disperse and alienate his biological children also made it possible for him to part with the black men and women that slavery had metaphorically defined as "his children" as well.

Which meant that there remained one more act to complete. As long as the slave was a kind of postmark, he also remained a passive agent, someone who could be trusted because he had no "Will" that was not Carter's possession. On June 16, 1789, though—two years before he signed the Deed of Gift—Carter wrote a letter to a black person. It was a nervous moment. While the overwhelming majority of letters in Carter's papers were written to white correspondents, and were addressed to "Sir" or "Madam," and signed "Your Humble and Obedient Servant" or "Your Unworthy Brother in Gospel Bonds," this letter lacked a deferential salutation, as though Carter could not bring himself to offer humbling platitudes to a slave, or saw correspondence with a slave as a defeat of the system of ritual deference embodied in those phrases. Instead, he promisingly addressed "Black brother Billy," and provided him with a set of instructions for delivering several sets of papers to several addresses. "Black brother Billy" had appeared in Carter's letters to white Baptists before, as "Black Baptist brother Billy," and it seemed even more promising that Carter still called himself Billy's brother even as his allegiance to the church that had brought them closer fell away. Whatever "Black brother Billy" was assigned to do, however, he strayed from Carter's instructions. In a letter on July 14, he was linguistically demoted to "black Billy," and Carter spoke of him in a tone of equivocal heartbreak, but with words that implied that a test had taken place: "When black Billy set out with the Papers mentioned before I expected that you would have been possessed with Said Papers long e'er now—however disappointments often happen." At this point, even "black Billy" disappeared, replaced by "Negro Billy," or "bearer Billy"—yet another linguistic demotion, or perhaps another slave with the same name.

If other events had taught him that he could not enslave blacks any longer, Robert Carter seems to have let this event teach him a corollary lesson: if he treated them as "brothers," they would disappoint him as much as white people did. Given the nature of Billy's "trial," and the

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rapidity with which Carter registered his disappointment, it is hard to imagine that he was prepared to reach any other conclusion. Or that any other conclusion would have led him more quickly to emancipation.

If Carter is the anti-Jefferson, the man who did not lack the will to free his own slaves, but who did lack the eloquence to make his love of freedom memorable, then the Deed of Gift is the anti-Declaration of Independence, a document that makes liberty look dull, but that is so devoid of loopholes and contradictions that no result but liberty could prevail.

On the first page, Carter wrote: "I have for some time past been convinced that to retain them in Slavery is contrary to the true Principles of Religion and Justice, and that therefor it was my duty to manumit them," but this statement constituted the limit of his willingness to explain himself. Instead, he seemed more interested in the manumission as a legal and practical matter: "I have with great Care and Attention endeavoured to discover that Mode of Manumission from Slavery which can be effected consonant to Law and with the Least possible Disadvantage to my Fellow Citizens." His solution was a "gradual Emancipation," fifteen slaves freed every January 1, with a series of painstaking amendments: first, that "the Oldest of my Slaves be the first emancipated"; second, that all "Male and Female Slaves . . . under the Ages of 21 and 18 Years" would be automatically freed when they attained those ages; third, that all children born to his slaves during the period of the gradual emancipation would be manumitted as well, when the males turned 21 and the females turned 18. The remainder of the document, which fills an entire volume in his correspondence, was censuses and schedules, and Carter seemed to approach this particular task with real intensity: amid these cross-referenced, redundant charts, the reader begins to sense that Carter wanted to make sure there would be no slave denied his freedom, or given his freedom one day before Carter himself had designated.

At first, Carter seemed tentative, unwilling actually to see his slaves free, or uninterested in beginning the manumission until it was foolproof. He spent the autumn of 1791 debating whether the law required that manumitted slaves register in their counties of residence across Virginia, or at his own home county courthouse: his patriarchal instinct still lively, Carter ignored his lawyer, decided that "Residency of Slaves I apprehend is to be where Master wills it," and that all emancipated slaves would have to return to Westmoreland. By winter, he began a new correspondence with his lawyer, regarding whether or not a freed slave could purchase other slaves—a crucial strategy for reconstituting the families that Carter's schedule for freeing slaves by age would divide. This time, he heeded John Maund's remarkable distinction between a "free man" and a "freed man," and concluded that "an emancipated Slave cannot hold any

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person in Slavery unless a particular Law Should give him the ability."

By February 1792, however, the first freed slaves finally received their manumission certificates at the Westmoreland courthouse, and Carter seemed to like the prospect. He presented "Copies of Emancipation" in person to sixteen slaves in July and August of 1792. Throughout the next year, he acted frequently either to accelerate or to ease his former servants' transition from slavery to freedom. He wrote a special deed of manumission for thirty slaves over the age of forty-five, "every expence arising on their Accounts . . . to be reimbursed by Robert Carter, or his estate," and created a "common stock" of money to pay his slaves' travel expenses to the courthouse. Over the objections of his overseers, he rented land to dozens of free blacks, hired them as artisans, and allowed individual slaves anxious for their turns at emancipation to "bargain for themselves"—to hire themselves out and keep their own wages. In this manner, the largest recorded private emancipation in American history was undertaken: the court records through which John Randolph Barden (author of that Duke dissertation) sifted confirm 280 manumissions, but other evidence—legal documents, censuses, and birth records—all implies a much larger total, one possibly exceeding Carter's initial schedules.

There are many possible reasons why Carter worked so forcefully ("this business requires expedition," he wrote in 1795), despite his initial concern that he would "inconvenience" his white neighbors. As always, he seemed willing to risk the alienation of his peers in the presence of a revelatory truth that led him elsewhere. Possibly, the white community was indifferent: the manumission was greeted with almost complete silence from local and national newspapers, except for a one-sentence note in the *Virginia Gazette* and a short commendation in the *Baptist Register.* Possibly, many resisted the manumission but were stunned into silence by its executor's wealth and power. Carter saved two letters—one from an overseer who told him that "Your negroes flushed with notions of freedom particularly at this time will require some little rigour," and an anonymous letter five years later from an individual who claimed to speak for "a vast majority of the community" and argued that "the consequences of the step, are too injurious to do otherwise than complain of them"—but there is no way to say whether these messages constituted the entirety of white protest to the manumission, or the only salvaged portion. Only Carter's sons and sons-in-law registered open bitterness toward the manumission, which, of course, was reducing their inheritance year by year: John Tasker Carter stated that he would "do all in his power to frustrate" the "scheme of emancipation," while son-in-law John Peck chased slaves off his farm before their scheduled emancipations rather than provide for them.

As his relationship to white Virginia quieted, however, Carter's rela-

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tionship with his slaves, freed and unfreed, became correspondingly more complex. Some slaves chose liberty through flight rather than waiting for their turn on his schedule: in December 1792, he told captured "Jack" and "Dick" that their actions "did not comport with the expectation of men who were to become free," and sent them back to Libra plantation to wait until 1799 and 1800. For the most part, however, Carter's slaves were adepts at patience: most chose to remain in slavery until their turn arrived, or understood that direct negotiation with Carter provided the likeliest path to early liberation.

With these slaves and ex-slaves, Carter struck terms that showed how deeply he was divided between the desire to maintain his patriarchal aura and the desire to be rid of it. He rented farms to "Prince" and "Sam Harrison," allowed them to reconstitute their still-enslaved families, provided them livestock, and gave them "sundry jobs" that paid off a year's rent with six weeks of light work. Simultaneously, he forced these men to "hire" their wives and children, and wrote clauses into their leases that obliged them to remain part-time slaves: "Prince also agrees to receive + deliver Grain as heretofore without any compensation." Sometime in the mid-1790s, in fact, Carter began to use the verb *dispose* to describe the emancipation of slaves, a word that suggests how unsentimental he had grown about the enterprise. By 1792, he must also have become aware of the unintended consequences of the manumissions: the likelihood that some of his tenants were working slave children harder to compensate for their emancipated parents; the rebellious and ominous sons; the slaves from other men's plantations who, if the anonymous correspondent reported truthfully, were "procuring false . . . certificates of their being Mr. Carters free men." One suspects this last circumstance troubled Carter especially, pitting his antipathy to slavery and his respect for the political astuteness of African-Americans against his desire for control and his love of a good schedule. One suspects he had just enough slaveholder left in him to want his slaves to be free only when he wanted them to be free, but not enough to close the loophole through which black men and women from neighboring plantations were passing to freedom.

By the end of 1793, however, Robert Carter was done. If the emancipation of his slaves brought him some satisfaction, he must surely have wearied of constant negotiation with newly freed slaves, with angry white tenants, with lawyers, and especially with discontented children: "Thus—thus—it is with Parents in the Material World," he wrote. Surrendering Virginia (or surrendering to Virginia) once and for all, he ended the year by moving north to Baltimore and surrounding himself with members of the tiny Swedenborgian New Church. At this point, he seemed to have accepted defeat, again, "in the material world," telling his daughter Harriet in 1803 that "I do acknowledge that my plans and advice have never been pleasing to the world."

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And there was, in fact, an extraordinarily solitary quality to his last decade. His daybooks are filled with a retiree's minutiae, rendered comic by the royal third person he continued to employ: "RC paid 2 pence for one Apple"; "RC received boiling coffee on the back of Left Hand." In 1796, he gave away his remaining plantations to his children, first making sure that his sons-in-law could not inherit his property, and that free black tenants were given good binding leases. In November 1798, he told his son-in-law Spencer Ball that "I have relinquished all personal claim . . . save only, an annuity during my natural life." He began writing little religious daybooks, arguing such points as "a true believer may finally fall from grace," or "Against Laying on of Hands." He collected clippings that claimed the apocalypse was near. He skipped around Baltimore's churches, sometimes with his widowed daughter Julia by his side: "in the Morning attended at the Romish Chapel—Noon at the Baptist Meeting House . . . attended the Dunckard's Meeting." Sometime in the early morning of March 11, 1804, he was found dead in his bed by his son George, who described the scene to family friend Robert Berkeley in a short note that contained a postscript arranging the purchase of new slaves.

By luck or design, however, the Deed of Gift hardened like the rock of ages. Before leaving Virginia, Robert Carter appointed Benjamin Dawson, a Baptist minister he had met four years earlier, as his business agent. From 1793 to 1804, Dawson was Carter's good and bad angel. Carter gave him broad financial responsibilities, most of which he executed so incompetently that Carter spent the last few years of his life trying to retract Dawson's control of his plantations. At the same time, Dawson proved wonderfully competent at making sure the schedules on Robert Carter's Deed of Gift were strictly followed. Carter's sons, who hated the manumission, unsurprisingly hated Dawson as well, and within six months of Carter's death in 1804 sued to revoke his power of attorney and overturn the Deed of Gift. By 1808, however, Dawson defeated Carter's sons in the Virginia Court of Appeals; the court could find no legal flaw in Carter's endless schedules and censuses. By the time Dawson was through (and Barden found evidence that he was reminding farmers to free the children of Carter's slaves in 1826), the Deed of Gift had a momentum of its own: as late as 1852, nine years before the Civil War, Carter's descendants were still freeing the descendants of Carter's slaves under the terms of Carter's original document, as if he were somehow still watching.

On my first trip to Nomini Hall I passed through Monticello, in midsummer, high season, which is the way to do it: the hour wait for admission provides plenty of time to reflect on the fact that Thomas Jefferson has never been more famous. By contrast, the small parks devoted to the birthplaces of George Washington and Robert E. Lee—roughly one hundred and fifty miles east of Monticello—feel like blissful

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quiet backwaters of history. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Northern Neck of Virginia yielded up two future presidents and the Lees: the Potomac River ran along its north edge like a Parisian boulevard, and sloops from Europe went door-to-door at the great plantations, creating a commerce of goods and ideas that gave the region the intellectual hum of a powerful city. In our century, however, it is one of America's forgotten places, a run of unsentimental small towns and achingly beautiful sunsets on a scenic loop between Fredericksburg and Williamsburg.

Nomini Hall is not open to the public. A signpost on the side of Route 202, just past a Virginia Department of Transportation shed, says that the original mansion, which burned down in 1850, was "not far from here," but provides no further direction. It also describes Nomini as the home of the "celebrated" Robert Carter, but neglects to say why he was celebrated, except as the employer of Philip Vickers Fithian, the family tutor whose diaries remain one of the most detailed primary sources on the slaveholding household. If you want to find Nomini, you will have to ask somebody, maybe several people, before you can get the following directions: take a right turn just past that marker onto Beale's Mill Road, take another right at the stop sign, go about a mile, then look for a modest wooden gate in the vicinity of a less modest cattle guard. Once you are standing at that gate, though, there is no mistaking that you are at the threshold of something that was once epic. The two rows of giant poplars still stand, although several are gone, and the remainder are wilder, more striking, than they must have been when they led somewhere. The avenue that runs up the bluff to the great house is still there, too, though it is only gravel and has been cut in two by a wash filled with hundreds of tires. And the house is still there—it was rebuilt in 1851—and it is still tall, square, and white, but even from two hundred yards you can see that it needs paint, and some new Faulkner to tell its story.

Despite outward appearances, there has been a renaissance at Nomini Hall in the last decade. This, however, has been largely a private matter for the people of Westmoreland County. In 1988, the Jerusalem Baptist Church placed a small marker alongside the old slave cemetery, across the road and a quarter mile down past the cattle gate. It takes a good guide to find this place, buried in deep forest, the ground covered in periwinkle, with shallow depressions marking the grave sites. In 1991, an energetic local businessman named Frank Delano (of the "People's Oil Company," Peace Corps, and resonant Delano bloodlines) and a group of local churches and historical organizations used the field beside the cemetery to commemorate the bicentennial of the Deed of Gift. One thousand men and women came to the field to dance and listen to speeches. Black men and women from neighboring towns reported moments of sweet tension as they heard the names of the freed slaves read aloud, and

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recognized names familiar to them from the stories told by their grandparents and great-grandparents. And the media turned out—from Washington, New York, and Richmond—and for that one day, Robert Carter had his place in history.

On the other side of the road, the old South is being revived from an opposite angle. One of Robert Carter's daughters, either Frances or Anna, married one Dr. John Arnest, and the house and surrounding lands have stayed in the line ever since; but the estate that stretched for 77,000 acres in Carter's time was sold off in pieces for almost two centuries, until the twenty-five-acre parcel surrounding the house was all that remained. In the last decade, however, Nomini has risen. An archaeologist from a small Virginia college now brings his students here, and they have uncovered the foundations of the old schoolhouse and the mansion. The youngest living Arnest son, who married a descendant of Thomas Jefferson, has bought back Nomini and more than one hundred acres of the surrounding land. He and his wife have framed that postcard reproduction of Robert Carter's portrait on a wall in the house, which they have restored and even stretched out, incredibly, back nearly to the seemingly lost foundation lines of the original plantation manse.

The family cemetery has also been recovered, cleared of cow excrement, and surrounded by a low brick wall. Here lie the remains of Robert Carter, in a grave so unmarked that the only way you can find him is to search for the anonymous red clay brick that marks the grave site of his wife and, facing south, turn to her right and look down at nothing.

For two centuries, Robert Carter has been a non-person, erased from almost every historical account, like a Soviet commissar who had lost favor with Stalin. If the reason why Carter freed his slaves remains a mystery, it remains a mystery of character, the kind we routinely face when we try to explain why anyone who should be fully invested in the status quo instead commits an act of radical and self-abnegating good.

The greater mystery of Robert Carter, however, has to do with the character of his country: how does an event that should clearly have stirred passions in its time, and inspired at least some historical interest in our own, inspire silence? Over the past three decades, numerous historians and literary scholars have written what are known as "reception histories": explanations of how an individual, event, or document is reinvented for different generations. What Robert Carter requires is an "evasion history": an explanation of why two centuries of historians, politicians, and citizens, practicing a multitude of different political stances, have sidestepped around Carter and his Deed of Gift, and have never constructed a narrative of American history in which his story was valuable, useful, or even worthy of a commemorative pause.

The effacement must have begun early, as early as that first year after

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he signed the Deed of Gift. Robert Carter made the decision to free his slaves in the 1780s and early 1790s, a period when Virginians, inspired by revolutionary democratic fervor, created a legal space in which the emancipation of African-Americans would be permitted. He freed his slaves, however, during the late 1790s and 1800s, a period in which white Virginians moved to contain the flow of emancipations, and to redefine a large free black population as a threat to the social order. On the grassroots level, white Virginians in the 1790s increasingly treated the manumission of slaves like a civic sin. Publicly, they kept quiet, assigning to emancipation the aura of a taboo. Privately, they derided the emancipators: Warner Mifflin, a Quaker who freed his slaves, wrote that "it was then circulated that Mifflin had set free a parcel of lazy, worthless Negroes, that he could make nothing by them, and therefore set them at liberty"; upon providing the freed slaves land and teams in exchange for half of their produce, "their tune was turned, and it was reported, that Mifflin was making more money by his Negroes now, than ever, and keeping them in more abject slavery, under the pretence of their being free."

Whether Robert Carter heard similar "tunes" might be less relevant than whether he heard anything at all. As a Quaker and anti-slavery activist, Mifflin was an easy target. Carter, however, was a startling one: his family had built Virginia, and built it ruthlessly, and now one of its members wanted to dismantle the social order that had taken a century to construct. If Carter faced derision, even contempt, then leaving the state—and leaving Benjamin Dawson as an abolitionist time bomb ticking in its midst—must have seemed a sensible option. For his peers and neighbors, however, the early 1790s represented the high-water mark in their tolerance of emancipation: as they digested the news of disarray in France and slave revolution in Haiti, and contemplated the increasing number of free blacks among their neighbors, Robert Carter must have begun to look like a danger and a luxury. As historians have noted, the great Virginia planters responded to the slave rebellion in Haiti by maintaining a public silence while tightening the slave code in their own country. Faced with the fact that one (and only one) of the wealthiest men in Virginia showed no fear of free blacks, the remainder likely found that silence and similar legislation was also the best way to "absorb" (to use Philip Morgan's words) the "severe contradiction" of their ethos implied by Carter's Deed of Gift.

In retrospect, it is clear that Robert Carter freed his slaves during a brief interlude in the history of the antebellum south during which voluntary emancipation seemed like a real possibility. If the institution of slavery in America had been somehow gradually and peacefully disbanded, he might be remembered as a pioneer. Instead, as Robert McColley notes, slavery in Virginia was "fixed more securely" in 1815 than in 1776, despite the manumissions. As Edmund Morgan observes in

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American Slavery/American Freedom, "Virginia's republicans had the decency to be disturbed by the apparent inconsistency of what they were doing," but "were far more disturbed by the prospect of turning 200,000 slaves loose to find a place in their free society." In order to justify the contradiction between their stated democratic ideals and their practice of slaveholding, the gentry of the early-nineteenth-century South increasingly argued that emancipation, while desirable, was impossible. Jefferson, of course, argued famously in 1819 that "we have the wolf by the ears and we can neither hold him nor let him go." In *The Constitution Construed,* one of the first three books assigned at Jefferson's University of Virginia, John Taylor wrote that "it was folly to think of emancipating them." By 1831, in fact, a representative in the Virginia legislature was capable of describing emancipation as "a daydream." In defense of this notion, another representative in that same legislature cited Jefferson's failure to provide in his will for his slaves' freedom as evidence that emancipation was impractical—"sufficient" evidence, in fact, "to put to flight all the conclusions that have been drawn from the expressions of his abstract opinions" in the Declaration of Independence. These were easy arguments for these men to make: one can almost hear the assured, disdainful pleasure in their voices. The best evidence that contradicted them, that argued that emancipation was sensible and slavery was the daydream, was buried where no one would find it.

Ultimately, the reasons that Robert Carter disappeared—and remains disappeared—have less to do with what he did than with what others failed to do, less to do with the narrative of American history within which his story would fit than with the narratives of American history that his story contradicts. Just as nineteenth-century Southern politicians claimed that emancipation was impractical as a keystone argument in their defense of slavery, twentieth-century historians continued to make the same argument as a keystone in the defense of the slaveholding practices of the Virginian founding fathers. This defense has two familiar parts. First, the founders should not be judged by contemporary political standards, but by the standards of their day: as Andrew Burstein writes in *The Inner Jefferson,* "We should not expect his disengagement from the moral space he occupied." Second, the founders wanted to free their slaves, but no practical plan for emancipation existed: Douglas Southall Freeman, in *George Washington,* writes: "Had there been a practicable way by which he could dispossess himself of slaves, he would have done so long ago."

Robert Carter's Deed of Gift, of course, does substantial damage to these arguments. It becomes difficult to argue that the founding fathers acted liberally within their own moral universe when small slaveowners up and down the Virginia coast were freeing their slaves. It becomes impossible, however, to make the same argument when one of their

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peers commits the same radical act. Similarly, the argument that there existed no feasible plan for a mass emancipation makes sense only if Robert Carter's Deed of Gift is suppressed from the historical record. Richard Norton Smith writes that Washington's last will and testament represented "the most humane yet practical solution possible," ignoring not only Carter but the fact that Martha Washington incorporated the "most humane" aspects of her husband's plan—the fund he constructed for the support of freed slaves, for instance—into a faster and more efficient emancipation than he had thought possible. Joseph Ellis, in *American Sphinx*, notes that Jefferson could find "no workable answer to the unavoidable question: what happens once the slaves are freed?" In fact, Jefferson was not looking for one. If the history of the founding fathers were written in a manner that accounted for Robert Carter, they would be that much less heroic, but they could be regarded that much more fully as active agents in their own destinies, as men who made choices—who knew, as McColley writes, that "the Virginia statesman who came out publicly against slavery would be very quickly retired to private life," and who, as John Quincy Adams once said, "had not the spirit of martyrdom."

Taken individually, however, none of these arguments explains an evasion this entrenched and poetic. Robert Carter has not disappeared from the record only because he undermines certain tenets of history, or only because of a two-hundred-year-old series of strategic and partly conscious evasions by historians, politicians, and biographers. More crucially, he has disappeared from the historical record because he did something that transcends our ability to listen to our own past: we are all talking the same language about the same limits, the same possibilities, and he belongs to an America we cannot imagine.

Read through the histories of slavery, even the histories least invested in protecting the reputations of the founding fathers, and you will find certain locutions over and over, phrases that reiterate the idea of unanimous moral failure among the slaveholding elite: "slaveholders condemned emancipation as a subversive act;" "slaveholders strongly resisted emancipation;" "among the class of wealthy planters . . . not one Virginia statesman ever advanced a practical proposal for the elimination of slavery." On one level, this kind of locution seems justified: after two centuries of antebellum nostalgia, it is late in history to find new heroic slaveholders. On another level, however, these phrases reinforce something deep in the American grain, something that diminishes us: the belief that the powerful cannot also be radical, that the powerful never surrender that which makes them powerful. The demoniac Simon Legree helped Harriet Beecher Stowe sell millions of copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; the noble, courtly Ashley Wilkes did the same for Margaret Mitchell. But Americans have made no place for the reformed slaveholder: the "master" has two parts to play in the American story, and in both he keeps his

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power and his privilege until someone takes it away. No one waits for Bill Gates to give away the Windows patent, or for Nike to divide its incorporated self among the Vietnamese workers who, for pennies an hour, stitch soles to uppers. If Robert Carter's story is any guide, we would be speechless if they tried.

And speechless, too, if their songs of liberty lacked the open passion we assume precedes any stunning moral act. Of all the reasons that Robert Carter has been ignored, none is more disturbing than the most subtle: that we cannot imagine a version of American history where racial progress is made by ice, not fire. When Philip Morgan writes that "if manumission rates are a barometer for gauging the level of concern for slaves, then emotional attachments between masters and bondpeople may seem extremely shallow," he encapsulates a long-standing belief that racial progress comes from enhanced attachment between blacks and whites—from more dialogue, in the parlance of our day. Robert Carter met his slaves on the common ground of the dissenting church, but we make a mistake if we think only about the kind of bond they formed. Other slaveholders prayed with their slaves; other slaveholders probably "loved" their slaves more. Robert Carter freed his slaves because his heart was colder, because he lacked the passion for racism. His Deed of Gift was an act of profound detachment from what we might now label a codependent relationship: he transcended the phase of racial self-consciousness in which whites defined themselves (and their liberty) against blacks, and in which blacks were compelled to define themselves against whites in response. The men and women he freed, one imagines, understood: they rented his land, and sold him their produce, but not one single emancipated slave took his last name at the manumission ceremony. Probably that was the safe thing to do. They did not seem to love him or hate him: they were free, and that was better.

More than ever, Robert Carter is awkward evidence. Having undermined the logic of pro-slavery politicians before the Civil War, he does nothing to help heal the rift in the national story created forty years ago, when the civil rights movement and *Brown* v. *Board of Education* helped black Americans emerge from the virtual apartheid of Jim Crow to join their history to that of the establishment. In the interest of promoting a multicultural (or at least bicultural) vision of American history, teachers, scholars, writers, politicians, and students alike have accepted what amounts to a schizophrenic version of our nation's founding. It is only a radical tenth on one edge of the political spectrum that refuses to acknowledge that Thomas Jefferson was a significant defender of the principles of freedom, and it is only another radical tenth on the other edge that refuses to acknowledge that his practice of keeping slaves was a stunning contradiction to his articulation of those principles. The rest of

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us inhabit a murky middle ground where Jefferson and Washington, along with many of the other signers of the Declaration of Independence and writers of the Constitution, seem to have given us a riddle instead of a country: were they the best of men, or the best of hypocrites?

Because this perspective seems evenhanded, even sophisticated, we forget that it has been out in the open for four or five decades, and we have grown complacent with it. In this new version of American history, we accept that we are a people badly divided about race. Washington and Jefferson remain our founding fathers, even as we reveal the contradictions between what they said and what they did, precisely because we now accept those contradictions as our birthright: "the paradox is American," Edmund Morgan writes. It is even taught in the schools, where it is now more canonical than the conservative view of the founders we all pretend is canonical. Joseph Ellis writes, "My own experience as a college teacher suggested that most students could be counted on to know two things about Thomas Jefferson: that he wrote the Declaration of Independence, and that he had been accused of an illicit affair with Sally Hemings, a mulatto slave."

In our current enshrinement of Thomas Jefferson—which, as Ellis suggests, does not lose momentum for being challenged—we accept that the nation's founding inherently possesses this contradiction, that the idea of America has always promised more than Americans at any given time were willing to deliver: "Thomas Jefferson," Julian Bond writes, "embodies the conundrum on race . . . this gross imbalance between national promise and execution." We hope that our awareness of this schism will drive us over and over to do the right thing, and for historical precedent we look to the Emancipation Proclamation, women's suffrage, and the civil rights movement. But we lean heavily on this single interpretation of how we can make our country a better place. We have rejected slavery, but not the incrementalism of mind and spirit that saved slavery over and over. We still are not interested in someone who failed to suffer from a "gross imbalance" between promise and execution. There's no paradox there, only more guilt for being so paradoxical ourselves.

The possibility exists, of course, that we are the most equitable generation of Americans that has ever existed, and that we have grown comfortable with this ambivalent telling of American history because it is the only fair version. But we ought to consider the possibility that we are the shapers of history now, and that we have made for ourselves the only Jefferson and the only Washington that seem at home amid the struggling and contradictory progress toward racial equality of the last four decades—an age that, like the revolutionary epoch, was thick with political voices who knew how to say exactly what is right on matters of race, but lacked the will to implement any motion that might be perceived as extreme. It is a sorry tribute we make to Jefferson, Washington, and the

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other founders when we continue to insist that they were larger than life—and when we do so in order to blame our own confusion and ambivalence on the heroic power of their confused and ambivalent legacy. But we tip our hand when we continue to ignore Robert Carter, whose example is enough to remind us that there existed men and women during the Revolutionary War who knew what was right and did not lack the personal will to act on that knowledge.

The more one reads in the twenty-first century about someone like Robert Carter, the more one feels a sense of fury and frustration that there were already men and women in the 1790s prepared to surrender money and power to bring a dull end to the institution of slavery, that the whole thing—the Civil War, Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan, two hundred years of relentless bitterness and division—could have whimpered and died in the Potomac tidewater. It is infuriating to consider this alternate history, in which Robert Carter is the founding father of the only American Revolution we truly lost. It is even more infuriating, however, to consider that we have been unable to find a single use for him. He does not soothe us, excuse us, or help us explain ourselves. But what is most incriminating is that Robert Carter does not even interest us, because that forces us to consider whether there now exist similar men and women, whose plain solutions to our national problems we find similarly boring, and whom we gladly ignore in exchange for the livelier fantasy of our heroic ambivalence.

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KATE BARNES

The Story She Knew

Clouds above the calm sea
trail their reflections all the way in
from the islands, just as sloops
stand over their own sails
so lengthened on water that they look
like ribbons of light, endless.

One early morning
in May (it was long ago)
a girl with black hair galloped alone
on a small bay horse through the deer park
near Copenhagen. The young beech leaves
reached out their earliest green, the oak trees
stood waiting, a thousand years old. Herds
of white fallow deer rose from their beds
among the ferns, and streamed away
like water foaming over a stone dam
in spring rain.

This was a story
I thought I knew already. I felt certain
the deer came from the margins of a book
called *History* that told many sorrows, the falls
of empires, great kingdoms
sown with salt—although the letters
seemed to dance on the pages
as I read them. The new leaves
hung from the trees half-folded, and I was sure
I could feel the world still holding its breath
all around me when my lover's body
sank into mine, the same breath
it holds when a swan rears his heavy breast
high over the water, getting ready

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to kick his way into the air, while a being
made out of nothing but radiance
stretches far away beneath him
on the black surface; the same pause
it makes for a long, long moment
before the last contraction that brings the child—
compressed, bloody, not yet breathing—
into the flooding light.

The Last Week in May

I considered my death.
I knew it was riding toward me
like a man on a small white horse
riding through falling snow, but no faster
than the wild cherries were blooming then
by the ditch, or the old pear tree,
standing twisted at the bottom of the lawn,
went on opening her thick blossoms,
petal after white petal.

Kate Barnes, Maine's first poet laureate, lives on a blueberry farm on the mid-coast. Her book of poetry *Where the Deer Were* has just been reissued in paperback by David Godine.

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Above Settle

LOLA HASKINS

The contour lines come fast, like flood-marks
or the ancient tracks of animals circling a fire.
Finally I reach the top, and in all four directions
there they are: the stone barns, the moors,
the sheep scattered like crumbs. And then
a mist takes everything away, as if someone
had put white hands over my eyes and said,
I will not let you see, you cannot stand this.

Lola Haskins, who teaches computer science at the University of Florida, has published five books of poetry, most recently *Extranjera*. Two collections are forthcoming this year: *Desire Lines: New and Selected Poems*, from Story Line Press, and *The Rim Benders*, from Anhinga Press.

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Driving Myself Sane

TIM MORRIS

I never drove till I was twenty-five. Why not is connected to various family dynamics that I pay therapists to hear about, so I had better not violate professional confidences by repeating the whole story here. The short version is that I was only sixteen when I graduated from high school in New Jersey in 1975, and the driving age was seventeen. In college, I didn't need a car; in graduate school, I couldn't afford one. Later, I rode the bus to my teaching job at Rutgers, until a sense of my own eccentricity forced me to take driving lessons.

I was sure then (and still am, on my shakier days) that I would kill somebody soon after taking the wheel of a car. My mother's reaction was succinct: "Clear the roads, Timothy's learning to drive." Driving instructors were even less sanguine. Whenever we got into traffic, my first instructor inserted a spare steering wheel into a mechanism that let him control the car from the passenger seat. He worked in a controlled panic. He smoked quite a lot.

I understood my first instructor's qualms. An illusion of perspective—the fact that the hood of a car looks vast in proportion to the tiny lanes you're headed for—dissolved my confidence. I was convinced that I was going to hit everything I came close to. At best, I thought, I'd scrape against parked cars, shaving off their door handles as I went by. (All cars were redesigned with flush door handles shortly after I learned to drive. This cannot be a coincidence.)

My first instructor had a maxim. "Look up into the distance," he told me, "and the car will go where you're looking." This worked for a few seconds at a time. But by looking way up the road, I was missing the

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chance to observe and avoid the curb. When I looked at the curb, interestingly enough, I would bounce into it. This limited my progress. "Look into the *distance*," he repeated. "It's just like riding a bike." I didn't have the heart to tell him that I couldn't ride a bike either.

I made some progress in propelling the car, however, and then I took the written test. I failed it twice. It was full of things that other drivers knew implicitly. "On an ice-covered road at night in the fog, how much distance should you leave between your car and the one in front of you?" I'd be home in bed with a hot chocolate on a night like that, mate. Okay, what are my options? "50 feet, 100 feet, 200 feet, 500 feet." As if I have any idea what those distances look like, let alone how to judge them at night in the fog. Am I supposed to get everybody to stop on the icy road, take out a tape measure, mark off 100 feet, and then proceed? After missing that question, I went on to one about when to display parking lights. I didn't know what parking lights were. I thought they were those big fixtures in parking lots that come on by themselves at dusk. Wrong again. Then came a section on the meaning of hand signals: palm out, palm back, extended, pointing, or arm cocked as if wearing a plaster cast. All of them match specifications in the New Jersey Highway Code. But since the only hand signal really used in New Jersey is the middle-finger extension, which can mean "back off," or "sit on this," or simply "hello," I was again at a loss, and again wrong.

Finally I passed the test by paying an extra fee to the driving school for a list of correct answers. No questions. Just answers. "Double yellow." "Fifteen seconds." The world needs more such lists. Skip the debate and provide the right answers. We'd all be better off. Unfortunately, success on paper meant that I had to succeed on the road. I failed the road test the first time when the inspector, alarmed at my tendency to endanger door handles, proposed that I make a 150-degree turn across six lanes of traffic at an intersection where my visibility was blocked by a warehouse. I got across three lanes before he had to step on the brakes himself to prevent us from hitting an oncoming Buick. All the way back to the police station, I was still sure he'd pass me. I hadn't *hit* the Buick, had I? What is road safety about, anyway, results or style?

There I was, twenty-five years old, after nine weeks of lessons, no closer to a license than before. I couldn't understand it—not my failure, but the fact that others passed. Driving a car was patently impossible. It was only massive good luck that prevented all the cars in New Jersey from piling together into a twisted mess of steel every morning on Route One. Nobody could have better results directing a car along a road than I'd had. It was simply who you knew that got you your license at seventeen.

I was finally taught to drive by a new instructor named Russ Casey. Russ was a quiet fellow who looked like Clark Kent. He had walked away from an engineering career to teach driving. He just liked to teach

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people physical skills. He'd have been as happy teaching bike riding or swimming or roller skating, and I probably should have kept him on to teach me all three. Where my first instructor had operated on the assumption that I should get wherever I was going as fast as possible, Russ had a different principle: "Slow your approach." The idea was never to stop and never to go fast. If you slowed your approach enough, you could go through every light when it was green. If you never stopped, you would never have to drop into first gear. You would save gallons of fuel in every tankful and reduce our dependency on Middle East oil. If Russ Casey had taught every American to drive, we'd never have been in the Gulf War. As it is, we have the situation in my current home of Arlington, Texas, where 200,000 people in Suburbans go like hell trying to stay out of the way of one man in a tiny Honda who slowly makes every light.

Russ got me through the road test without difficulty. The only hitch was that the State of New Jersey decided I was a female, and coded my license accordingly. Even now, I occasionally get notices for free mammograms, and I'm grateful for them. But I still couldn't drive. Driving teachers, you see, teach in company cars. These cars have automatic transmissions. Adjunct instructors of English composition can't afford automatics, so I had to buy a Honda with a stick shift. I regressed to automotive infancy.

I still drive a manual Honda hatchback, the same model I learned to drive sixteen years ago. There are objective reasons for this. It's a fuel-efficient car, it's surprisingly roomy, and it's cheap, since associate professors of English don't make a whole lot more than adjunct instructors. But the main reason I drive a Civic is that if I ever had to learn another set of driving protocols, I would panic. I know where this clutch is and these gears and this control for the intermittent rear windshield wiper, and if, God forbid, Honda should ever go out of business, I would have to start over from scratch.

It was a preview of purgatory trying to get my first stick-shift Honda up and down the hills of the Raritan Valley. Each stop sign pointed my front end up or down, and each stop meant a stall. In Texas, where everything is flat and everyone rolls through stop signs, I might have had a fighting chance. In Jersey, I lurched from gear to gear. My trials with the transmission were complicated by the fact that early Civics featured a manual choke. You had to hold the choke just right to start the car, so every time I stalled I would have to sprout a third hand, or, alternatively, give up steering altogether.

One night—luckily in neither ice nor fog—I was trying to climb the hill that leads from the Raritan River bridge into Highland Park, New Jersey. My wife and I were headed for Mamie O'Rourke's steak house, craving double mushroom burgers, and she was letting me drive the stick. The Highland Park hill features a steady incline up to a stoplight. Limp-

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ing along as Russ Casey taught me, I just missed making the light—and never started again. Over and over, I'd stall, crank, try to slip from the clutch to the gas, stall again. It would have become boring if not for the drivers behind me. All of them were seventeen years old. All of them were driving manual pickups. None assumed I had an engine problem. Instead, they all knew precisely what I wasn't able to do. They peeled out past me, screaming obscenities about my lack of skill with a stick. Several made the gracious Jersey gesture of pulling around me, slamming on their brakes, and reversing to within inches of my front bumper, even as I was rocking back and forth behind them. They'd all learned to double-clutch in the fifth grade in their cousin's Gremlin. They delighted in the spectacle of a grown man unable to bring a Honda uphill. I finally had to get out and let my wife drive me up into Highland Park.

Years later, after moving to Texas, the land of the pickup truck, I wonder if I've ever really learned to drive a stick. A while ago, out driving my Honda with a real Texan as passenger, I made what I thought was a smooth shift into third. "Does it always shudder and clang like that when you go into third?" she asked me. "Yes," I said. "Then that's what all Hondas do," she said. "When mine does that, I just assume it's operator error. I'm going to call the dealership." After I'd dropped her off, I shifted very, very carefully into third. No shudder, not even the whisper of a gear grinding. The phrase "operator error" became fixed in my vocabulary. Most of the time, I'm a hazard to gearboxes, but there come days when everything synchronizes, when the car is a fluid extension of my will. I slow my approach. I deftly change lanes to avoid Men Working In Trees, and just as deftly change back. I comb my hair and pocket the comb without wavering in my lane. I peel into a crowded lot and make a beautiful hairpin turn at the limit of my wheelbase to pick off the perfect parking space. I even remember to turn off my headlights. Baby, I was born to run.

But most of the time, driving is a daily relearning of habits I learned too late in life for them ever to become second nature. I am perpetually held up to myself as living proof of my own ineptness. As I slow and lurch and slow and lurch and slow and lurch to get into fourth gear, every car in the lane behind pulls out to pass me. At four-way stops, I meekly surrender the right-of-way to cars on either side, even if I've gotten there first. I sit for minutes at a time at parking-lot exits, not daring to make a left turn across traffic, as a line of cars builds impatiently behind me. I would rather be anywhere else but here. I want it to be a dream. I want to wake up and be all at once where I was headed all along.

Sometimes I have no consciousness of driving. I'll be walking back from the office and have no idea of where I've parked. Looking back on the morning commute, I have no memory of getting there. I go the same way every day; I change lanes at the same point every day. Since there's no

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need to navigate, my brain does other things. I talk to myself. I sing, which annoys my son; but he is getting a fine education in jazz standards of the 1940s. I compose aggrieved dramatic monologues to be delivered if I'm denied promotion. I draw up and revise lists of the greatest shortstops of the twentieth century. I almost run into a minivan—hey, this is interesting! How did these cars get into my baseball fantasies?

Routine driving means that I can erase all but the most urgent incoming visual cues. Brake lights get through, but little else short of a helicopter landing in the roadway has much effect. Sometimes I drive one route while I imagine another. I'm leaving the supermarket, and I have to go next to the pet store, and how best? Get into that left-hand filter lane, negotiate the turn, make two more rights instead of a left and come out at the loop road in the rightmost of the two left-turn lanes there, I think—as all the while I am, in a different (and realer) reality, weaving in and out between construction cones. I see what I'm really seeing only provisionally, like the screen-in-screen image on a big TV. They truly didn't cover this on the New Jersey written driver's test.

Driving shows you rifts in your being. Usually I am the most mild-tongued of people. I use bad language in only two situations: when a computer doesn't do what I want it to, and when I am driving. I curse at passing drivers, though not loud enough to be heard, because they presumably have concealed handguns. Nor do I really mean to call them the names I use, modified with all manner of obscene adjectives. When someone nearly hits me, lurching carelessly across seven lanes as if no other car existed, my limbic system just takes over. I curse like a reptile Marine.

There's little danger anyone will hear me cursing, however. In Texas, no matter what the time of year, no matter what the temperature outside, nineteen out of twenty drivers keep their windows rolled up tight. In August, this makes a lot of sense. Temperatures can hit 105, enough to melt human fat right through the skin. Every few Januaries, too, we get a blue norther of a frost that makes us reach for the heater button. But most of the year the highs are between 60 and 80, and everyone's car is sealed shut all the same.

Once again I am the oddball. I've got the windows down, singing "*Fais-moi valser*" in my best Piaf manner, inhaling great gulps of prairie air. All the other drivers carry their own air around. I consider these private atmospheres—custom mixtures of wet dog, generic cigarette, cheap shave cream, Joy perfume with its tang of canned tomatoes, and squashed school lunch. It's not a pretty imagining. Their air is their own and their eyes and ears are off-road, because they're talking into cell phones and looking at the cell phones as they do, as if eye contact with the receiver will impress their point on the person they're talking to. And between the rolled-up windows and those damn phones, they are not going to see the

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barriers coming down at the grade crossing, even in time to do the Texas Switchback around the gates and avoid the oncoming train.

With my windows always open, I've never hit a train. I have never hit anything. When I'm the driver I rarely worry about collisions. When I'm the passenger, it's another matter. Every peripheral motion seems to be an eighteen-wheeler hurtling toward our car. I press my feet to the floor of the passenger side, feeling that this sympathetic motion will bring the car to a halt. Drivers don't like that. They feel it reflects badly on them. It's a hard behavior to break, though. I picked it up young, from riding with my father, who used to drive with his forearms on the wheel, hunched over so that his head lightly grazed the windshield. He'd twiddle his thumbs in midair. Once, I swear, I saw him try to bite his fingernails from this position.

To avoid slamming on my imaginary brakes, I do yogic breathing and stretch out to my full length. The driver—usually my wife—feels even worse than if I were twitching. She seems to think that by relaxing completely I'm implying that I need to be anesthetized in order to ride with her. This puts strain on our relationship. But after all, being a sleeping passenger is the ultimate trust, isn't it?

I often slept in moving cars when I was young. My grandfather would buy a new Cadillac every year or two. They had enormous bench seats, front and back. To be honest, old Cadillacs were just twin beds mounted sideways on a chassis. The business of our extended family compelled my grandfather to bring me on long trips across the Illinois plains, taking half the night to fetch up at Great-Aunt Somebody's farm or Great-Uncle Whatever's mobile home. After night fell and the Cubs game on the radio ceased, there was little to do. Sitting up, I could see nothing but roadside reflectors as my grandfather's headlights swept over them. I'd lie down on the back seat and watch stars between the flowing electric wires that framed the road, converging and diverging as we passed the tall poles. Every so often I'd see a silo pass, up close and upside down. Sometimes I'd see red lights blinking on radio towers. They blinked in a staggered sequence, off against the horizon. You never passed that kind of tower up close. The world was held together at its rim by warning lights.

Falling asleep is not recommended, of course, when your own ten-year-old is asleep in back, so nowadays I resort to various tricks to stay awake on road trips, including liters of red pop, expanded chest breathing, Twenty Questions, and belting out "I Can't Get Started With You." Contrary to popular belief, it's easy to stay awake while driving across Texas. The terrain is diverse and piquant. There's the dominant motif of armadillo and cactus. A cross-Texas drive underscores them with cypress swamps in the east, piney woods in the center, rolling hills in the central west, mesquite prairies west of that, and ocotillo desert in the Trans-Pecos, not to mention billboards that announce FREE 72-OUNCE

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STEAK IF EATEN IN ONE HOUR and conveniently neglect to mention that you must also eat the baked potato, dinner roll, two vegetables, side salad, and pecan turtle cheesecake.

Texas offers variety. Oklahoma is another story. The one time I nearly fell asleep at the wheel was while crossing central Oklahoma on my way from Somewhere to Somewhere Else. It's a charming country of rolling hills and little homesteads. You go up a hill and down into a valley to find a farmhouse with cow and up a hill and down into a valley with farmhouse and cow and up a hill and down into a valley with farmhouse and cow and up a hill and down into a valley with farmhouse and cow, and seventeen cows later this gets really old. Only a quart of black coffee and a chicken-fried-steak basket got me back across the Red River in one piece.

On my everyday drives, though, there are few such exotic chances to re-enact the final scene of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Most of my drives are less than ten minutes long. They're the ellipses in my day, the time I waste for the privilege of living and working in the Texas suburbs. My wife, a long-distance commuter, soaks in hours of NPR and is a well-informed intellectual. I'm in the car only long enough to hear a couple of tracks on the Smokin' Oldies station.

I commute to a commuter campus. Students and colleagues assemble at my school from dozens of miles around. The most common excuse for late papers is not grandma died or the disk crashed but "car trouble." One morning when I had made it to work through an ice storm, a student called me to apologize for missing class: "We had ice on the roads here. I'm chicken to drive on ice." Woman, I am chicken to drive on fresh blacktop when it's 70 degrees out. Sort out your anxieties and come to class. I'm not only chicken to drive, but I'm out of my weight class on Texan roads. Compared with what other people drive here, my Civic might as well be a moped. Texans drive cars that can fit ordinary cars inside them. A childless Texan typically makes do with an extended-cab pickup, or maybe an SUV with oversize tires. The moment Texans give birth, they take the big vehicle and trade it in for a massive vehicle. People with one child tend to buy minivans, as if they need a choice of nine different areas for the baby seat. Two kids means a mandatory Suburban. I'm not sure they have a lot of Suburbans in other states, so let me explain them: a Suburban is an exaggerated station wagon with double back doors. It is the length of two Civics and the height of a convenience store.

Larger families, of course, need something more substantial than a Suburban, so the Humvee has become a common second car. Often I see Hummers driven not by Mom with the soccer team aboard but by someone's teenage daughter, alone, nipping out for a quesadilla and a liter of Surge. This seems wasteful of resources, but it points out the main reason for these behemoth vehicles. It's not that you necessarily have a

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lot of stuff to take from A to B, it's so that when somebody hits you, you will be able to walk away unhurt, even if you are not wearing a seat belt, which we object to wearing anyway because when did Big Government turn into our nanny? When Princess turns sixteen, Daddy buys her a Humvee. The more metal between Princess and the aggressor, the safer Daddy feels.

I haven't hit anyone, but as a bearded man with a Yankee accent in a foreign car, I am one of the horrors that haunt Southern parents' dreams. In turn, I'm duly intimidated by the weight of metal that other people's children drive around. The worst moments are when I come out of a store to find that I'm parked between an Expedition and an Excursion. Trying to see what's coming as I back out is futile. I accelerate gently in reverse, hoping that oncoming drivers will have the good sense to stop, or at least honk, if they can see me at all between the wheeled apartment blocks on either side.

The only time I was seriously hit was by a truck driver who didn't notice me. I had stopped to make a left turn. He saw me at first, because he stopped behind me. By the time the light turned green, he had forgotten I was there. He accelerated through my back hatch. When I confronted him, he explained that he just couldn't see that itty-bitty car in front of him. My fault again, naturally. If I had been riding an elephant, this never would have happened.

I learned too late. I will never be big enough to hold my own on the road. My son is getting no better a start in life. He's already missed too many formative wheeled experiences. When he was five we lived in a townhouse complex in North Dallas. One day, a neighbor child drove up in a big plastic play car, the kind they sell at Wal-Mart for as much as a used Saturn costs in real life. He let my son try driving. My son promptly crashed into a sandbox. When they saw how much fun that was, the parents of the other children started getting out their play cars. In moments, the streets of the complex were full of toy Jeeps and Corvettes and Barbie Cars and BMWs. Where these vehicles were stored, in our tiny townhouses, is still a mystery. But they were a staple of life. North Texans cannot reach reproductive age without knowing that they'll have to buy their kid some kind of car. My wife and I lacked the vehicle gene. So the neighbor kids executed complicated traffic maneuvers while my son was aimlessly colliding with them. It was very amusing. Half-a-dozen parents ran indoors for their camcorders. They circled the action, taping the cars, taping each other taping the cars. We didn't have a camcorder, either.

Once in your car, here in Texas, you are rarely out of it for the rest of your life. In the country, you get around in your pickup, and in the city, you get around in, well, your pickup. Cities in Texas are all out of proportion to human beings. Miles of space yawn between shops and schools and office buildings. If I set out on foot to go from the local

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library to the local rec center, both part of the same development, I first have to walk several blocks. After I pass the last house, a gulf opens up, with a tiny rec center at the focus of my gaze. The rec seems to get smaller as I approach, as if being retracted on casters. There's no shade, and no grass. And it's 108 degrees. And I say to myself, why didn't I take the car?

I didn't take the car because in reality it's only a quarter mile, and I'm in reasonable health for a man of forty. Like Nabokov's Humbert (in just this one respect, believe me), "I have the European urge to use my feet when a drive can be dispensed with." But such dispensation doesn't come often. The rec, the library, the supermarket, the school, the pizza place, the flower shop are strung out at the corners of section roads, a mile apart. At each stop, you put the car in first, set your brake, turn off your motor, unbuckle your seat belt, roll up your windows (Texans can skip this step), lock your door, and then, after dropping off a video or picking up a roll of film, repeat all those custodial steps in the opposite sequence. It's maddening. But Texans do it anyway. I've seen them, like Buster Keaton in *The Navigator*, literally drive across the street to get to the other side.

Texans cut down on the starting and stopping by using drive-throughs. When the first Krispy Kreme donut shop opened in Arlington, it was mobbed by customers looking for a sweet nostalgic mouthful. They all went into the drive-through. Traffic backed up for a mile across the Arlington street grid, hundreds of cars with their motors on and their windows up, nobody moving, spending an hour or more waiting. Meanwhile, all you had to do was park, get out, walk to the door of the shop, and walk back out again with donuts. It just never occurred to most people to do so.

Drive-throughs are everywhere now, but they started here. At the corner of Hillcrest and Daniel in North Dallas is the world's first drive-through bank. At the less posh corner of Center and Division in Arlington is the world's first drive-through pawnshop. I have no doubt that Texas also inspired the first drive-through fast-food places, the first drive-through liquor stores, the first drive-through pharmacies. If we weren't so repressed, we'd have invented drive-through whorehouses.

I don't use drive-throughs. I hate having coffee cups collapse in my lap and bags of food leak salty unguents onto the passenger seat. I hate filling prescriptions, those sacred edicts of medical authority, through a window cut into the blank wall of a drugstore. If I haven't parked and taken a temporary congé of my vehicle, I don't believe I've really *done* anything. Those waffle fries are not really slipping down my gullet unless I've turned off my motor, walked through a door, and ordered them standing up. I even park half a mile from my office. My colleagues see me walking to work and are struck with pity. They stop and ask if they can drive me to campus. Sitting in a car for a few hundred yards never has the obvious appeal to me that it does to them, so I say no. I am probably losing an opportunity to form effective professional networks.

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I love stretches of time when I don't drive at all. I enjoy academic conferences in big cities where I can restore my atrophied leg muscles. I treasure weeks in urban hotels, one of a million walking people, Poe's man of the crowd. When I travel I read my favorite mysteries, Simenon's Maigrets, where the hero walks the *trottoirs* but cannot drive. "Maigret . . . got lost in reflections and forgot he was driving. Two or three times, he didn't think of braking till the last second. He gave up trying." There is a man after my own heart.

When I get back to Texas, all at once I can drive with ease. My bad habits have melted away. I place my hands at ten and two o'clock on the wheel. I look, signal, shift, and turn—instead of moving first, looking, shifting, and hitting the signal as an afterthought. I slip between lanes of traffic doing forty, never a worry about hitting anything. Then a few days pass, with their flustering errands, and it's as bad as ever. After school in the afternoons I make the rounds and it seems that God himself has timed every road closing, every eighteen-wheeler backing out of an alley, every harried soccer mom whose van apparently lacks a steering wheel, every rusted-out pizza-delivering Pinto, and every fire engine screaming toward the local kolache shop, to interfere with my progress.

Fortunately those days are few. Most of the time I don't even realize that there are other drivers on the road. They don't realize I'm there, either. We slide past one another on the great wide Texan streets, encased in bubbles of safety glass. As other cars pass, I see my community frozen in small slices of road time. A woman makes a moue into her rearview mirror as she applies lipstick. A sullen white kid with ball cap on backwards plays rap music; from behind his rolled-up windows, you feel the lowest range of the bass. A couple in tank tops and cutoffs scream at each other, rocking their little pickup at a stoplight. An unseatbelted toddler climbs over a back seat and squashes her nose at me on the rear window. A beautiful woman approaches, makes eye contact with me. She stiffens, conscious of being admired, and passes irrevocably into a diminishing reverse image in my rearview mirror.

Such are my faces in the crowd. Once, when I was eight, I tested my memory deliberately. Next thing I see, I told myself, I'm gonna remember forever. We were stopped at a railway siding next to a grain elevator. The first thing I saw when I lifted my head was a pickup with a man driving and a girl sitting next to him. The truck had a gun rack on top and a tool chest behind the cab. The back of the man's neck was shaved. The girl had a blonde ponytail that flopped over her T-shirt. As they accelerated over the siding, their heads bobbed in unison, once, twice, three, four times, and then they were past, away on the blacktop, and the bobbing subsided like a spent wave. That is most of what I remember about 1967 in America.

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Which Side Are You On, Boys?

VIJAY SESHADRI

I never once asked my friend the documentary filmmaker Leo Hurwitz whether he had actually been a member of the Communist Party, but one day in his kitchen, ten floors above West End Avenue, he told me something like the truth. We were talking in the expansive way characteristic of conversations with Leo, who had an energetic mind and a broad range of reference, and knew how to use them both. That afternoon we'd been going through FDR (for whom Leo felt an admiration that was almost entirely unmixed); the history of New York's Armenian community; the dramatic differences in infant-mortality rates among various regions of India; Chinese restaurants old and new; Jesse Jackson; and the varieties of political rhetoric. This last subject led to Leo's unlooked-for revelation. The 1988 presidential campaign was under way, and George Bush had recently called Michael Dukakis a "card-carrying" member of the American Civil Liberties Union. I told Leo that I liked the rhetorical imagination behind this sound bite, at which point he grew quiet. He was standing at his sink, washing the coffee cups, and after a time he half-turned, not to me but to his kitchen windows, which were being smudged by wan late-afternoon Upper West Side sunshine, and replied that he had been called—when talking about his experience of the blacklist, Leo habitually used passive constructions—a card-carrying Communist, but that in fact he had never been a member of the Party.

I say that this revelation was "something like" the truth. Recently, I've made some halfhearted attempts to clear up this statement, and I always

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find myself tripping over the epistemological uncertainties of the blacklist era—an era that resembles a crime scene rendered unintelligible not only by the impassioned struggles of those involved but also by a long procession of tourists who have trampled through the police tape, obscured the places where the bodies fell, and made souvenirs of the material evidence. Leo was forced to play a part in this unedifying and unresolved situation. He had always been stubborn about refusing to let himself be boxed in by the "are you now or have you ever been" reductionism of the McCarthy era. But this stubbornness had, over time and because of historical changes, had the unintended consequence of confining him in a tedious martyrdom, of identifying him by the fact that he was a blacklist victim rather than by his filmmaking. A characteristically dismissive compliment paid to him in the last years of his life was that he was the "dean of the cinematic left." And when I was invited to meet him, early in 1987, through the offices of a mutual friend, the poet Rose Willey, the first thing I remember being told about him was that he had been blacklisted. Then I was apprised of what was understood to be the other pertinent fact about Leo—that he was the man who had directed the videotaping of the trial in Jerusalem for crimes against humanity of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.

It was in Leo's nature to wear his experience of the blacklist like a badge of honor, but at the end of his life he wanted to be remembered for what he had made, not for what he had endured. He never completely acknowledged this change in his attitude to his own life. To do so would have required him consciously to acquiesce to the postwar American political consensus, something he would have been unwilling to do, even if he knew how, which he didn't. This made ambiguities inevitable in his accounts of his political history. Even people who were close to him for a long time are at odds about the exact nature of his relationship to the Party. While looking around in archives for information about him, I read in the introduction to an interview with him in the *International Herald Tribune* that Elia Kazan—an alumnus of Frontier Films, the labor-film collective that Leo and his mentor, the great American photographer Paul Strand, founded in the thirties—had named Leo to the House Un-American Activities Committee. When I asked the filmmaker Manny Kirchheimer, who had worked with Leo in the sixties on some of his most beautiful films, if this was true, Manny told me that Kazan couldn't have named Leo because Leo had never been a member of the Party. Leo's second wife, Nelly, whom he married just before he died, in 1991, in a ceremony for which Manny and I were the witnesses, says what could be construed as the opposite. She insists he told her that he used to go to Party meetings in their very neighborhood. In the interview he gave to Columbia University's oral-history project, Leo leaves the impression—consistent with the person I knew, who would not have suffered the

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foolish and dangerous conformism of the Party gladly—that his political transactions were defined by the absolute independence of his spirit, rather than by his ideology. But in an interview he gave to the *Washington Times* in 1983, after he had received the Critics Prize from the (West) Berlin Film Festival for his last completed film, *Dialogue with a Woman Departed,* he directly contradicts what he told me in his kitchen in 1988. In that interview, Leo says, "O.K. I was a member of the Communist Party."

This last piece of evidence isn't as conclusive as it sounds. Leo could just as well have answered the way he did because he wanted to put to rest once and for all a question that had crippled his career. It would have been just like him to admit to a relationship he had actually never entered into simply because he hated the idea of being perceived, even remotely, as recanting his radicalism. He was also intransigent enough throughout his life to say or do something that exaggerated his past commitments. And, of course, there were lots of ways of being associated with the Communist Party through most of the 1930s, when the Party was a force, in New York and elsewhere in the world. Being associated with the Communist Party in the city in those years meant being associated with a widespread, commonplace heresy, baffling to most people but imbued with the glamour of the future and the aura of internationalism—something like being a soccer fan in today's New York. I have met people from that era who have described the Party of the thirties as a party. A Brooklyn-born woman I used to know—a beautiful, diligent person, the wife of a doctor who served as a medical officer in the Spanish civil war with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and in the same capacity with the U.S. Army during the Second World War—once told me that the Communists had the best dances and the most fun. She went on to add, defensively and defiantly, that Communist dances were the only ones at which blacks and whites mingled freely. Leo's world was rich with political relationships and entanglements, many of which were as harmless as going to a dance. Whether others were as dangerous as a vast, occult conspiracy directed by an enemy power against the foundations of the republic is something that Americans will be arguing about for decades.

When I get together with Manny and Nelly to talk about Leo—who is, for those who knew him at all well, impossible to forget—we approach the subject of his affiliation with the Party uneasily, when we approach it at all. This isn't because we're unsure about his politics. Leo was a Red to the end of his days. He never recanted or converted or obscured his faith. He was so candid and up front about his beliefs that it was ridiculous to locate him in the film-noirish precinct of the American imagination in which many of his fellow Reds have been quarantined—the precinct of secret cells and pumpkin patches and microfilm and spies and traitors and dupes of Stalin. Only a spymaster out of *Mad* magazine would have

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seen good espionage material in someone like Leo. The idea that he was treasonous seems just as absurd. He was in a contest for the soul of America. His feelings about his country owed less to Marx than they did to the New World visions of his favorite poets, Blake and Whitman and Hart Crane (whose friend the critic Gorham Munson married one of Leo's sisters and about whom Leo made a stunning documentary, *In Search of Hart Crane,* for National Educational Television, the predecessor of PBS). The business of America was justice for the oppressed, a radical egalitarianism its manifest destiny, and a duty to transform the world its burden of responsibility. Socialism was just a method, but about its importance he never wavered, even in the years I knew him, the years of glasnost and perestroika, when the death cries of the catastrophe known as the dictatorship of the proletariat and the thin, diminishing wails of the specter that once haunted Europe could be heard the world over. In those years, he might have been the Reddest person left on the planet. He had a short, solid body, which combined with his no-nonsense discursive style and his habits of indignation to leave the impression of overall bluntness, an impression mitigated by the look of keen rationality in his eyes and by his head and face, which were long and carefully sculpted, and would have been described in the nineteenth century as "fine." But this was just his body. Inside this physical frame there lived, waiting to spring forth, the unresting champion of the poor and downtrodden, the immemorial working-class hero, intellectual-workers' division—dissident, disenchanted, morally fervent. Sometimes, while you were talking to him about politics, entire historical eras would fall away, and you would feel a sharp shock of temporal dislocation, as if walking down Broadway you'd caught a glimpse of Engels or Gracchus Babeuf sitting in a coffee shop reading *PC World.*

Nelly and Manny and I are uneasy about the nature of Leo's political affiliations because we want the world to see him the way we do. We see Leo as a major twentieth-century American artist, and as someone whose work was unjustly marginalized because of his politics. We differ about the nature of his achievement. Because they were close to him for much longer than I was, because what they feel about him has become a part of what they feel about themselves, Nelly and Manny can't help seeing Leo as he was, politics, political films, and all. I prefer the incontestable Leo—the modernist post-political filmmaker of the late fifties and sixties, of the Hart Crane film and the magisterial "abstract" documentaries *Here at the Water's Edge* and *The Sun and Richard Lippold.* These films bear comparison to the finest American-modernist artifacts of the mid-century—the poetry and prose of Charles Olson, for example, or the music of Roger Sessions, or, closer to home, the dances of Martha Graham, one of whose legendary dancers, Jane Dudley, was Leo's first wife,

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and another of whose legendary dancers, the luminous Sophie Maslow, was the wife of one of his best friends.

We are of one mind, though, in believing that justice for Leo is long overdue. That the possibilities for his full rehabilitation are so tantalizing only adds to our frustration on his behalf. Leo was damaged by the hysteria of the blacklist era. He had been a pioneer in television—he was a founding producer of CBS television news, when it was inaugurated during the Second World War—but he had subsequently been named in *Red Channels,* the blacklist sheet of the television industry in the fifties, when television was exploding as a medium, and had to scratch for work and suffer humiliations of which he never spoke to me, but which left him with dark thoughts and memories to the end of his life. He was also, as it happened, a blacklist survivor. The huge, self-confident, almost nonchalant American capacity for tolerance and fairness gathered him in again. Many of his films were purchased by the Museum of Modern Art and are a part of its permanent collection. In the sixties, New York University hired him to be the head of its graduate film and television program. The production of *Dialogue with a Woman Departed*—his four-and-a-half-hour-long magnum opus of the 1970s, which represented a return to his political themes, and which is by turns a tender, bitter, and problematic attempt to justify his political faith—was, as they say, made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

None of this is enough for us, though. Why, we wonder, aren't Ph.D. candidates lining up at the doors of his family and friends, looking for dissertation material? Where are the Leo Hurwitz festivals at the Film Forum, in New York, and the Pacific Film Archives, in Berkeley? Where are the symposiums and colloquiums at major universities? When will we see, along with the homiletics of Wayne Dyer and Deepak Chopra, a Leo Hurwitz retrospective during Channel Thirteen's pledge week? Our desires for Leo might seem irrational. He was, after all, a documentary filmmaker, and documentary filmmakers, no matter how accomplished, don't get the respect and fame they deserve. Maybe this explains the galling fact that so few, among those whom one would expect to know, know who he is. Maybe it isn't politics, after all. Isn't it enough that MOMA has him in its permanent collection? For those of us who are familiar with Leo's story, it isn't. The drumbeat of vilification—sometimes faint, sometimes loud, occasionally deafening—that accompanied the public life of his generation of radicals echoes in our ears, and it is a sound we would like to silence. I for my part particularly wonder what acknowledgment and consummation will wipe from my memory the image I have of him in his last months, before he died of cancer, in 1991, when he sometimes looked outcast and morally isolated, as if he were a character in a novel by Conrad or Graham Greene rather than someone who had every right to reflect contentedly on a life of singular accomplishment.

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If it was suggested to Leo that socialism had crippled India's economy and left the Indian poor even more vulnerable than they would otherwise have been, he would say that the Indians simply hadn't gone far enough. He delivered convictions like this *sub specie aeternitatis,* and he argued them with intellectual assurance. He had concentrated in philosophy at Harvard—where he went, in the late 1920s, on a full scholarship, which he supplemented by waiting on tables at the Liberal Club—and had studied with Whitehead himself. He was as happy talking about Hegel and the labor theory of value as he was in front of a Moviola or behind a camera. If the subject of God came up, as it did sometimes when people saw his films at his home screenings and insisted, to his annoyance, that he was a "spiritual" filmmaker, he would say that Spinoza had looked into the idea of God and had ascertained that what was meant by God was simply the world itself. (*Q.E.D.*) One afternoon, while we were having a lunch of smoked sable and pickled herring from Murray's Sturgeon Shop, on Broadway—Murray's, along with several Chinese restaurants between Columbia University, at 116th Street, and the West Eighties, was the source of much of Leo's nutrition—he told me with a grave certainty that if Israel had become an authentic socialist state, with a vanguard multireligious working-class party, the conflict with the Arabs would have withered away, and the Middle East would subsequently have been transformed into a zone of peace and human development.

Leo unveiled his secret Middle East plan to me a few days after I'd seen what he had retained of his raw footage of the Eichmann trial. He had also shown me the half-hour documentary *Verdict for Tomorrow,* which he had made from his five hundred hours of tapes (only three hundred and fifty of which have survived, in archives in Israel and at the Jewish Museum, in New York) for the TV show *Lowell Thomas Presents. Verdict for Tomorrow* won a Peabody Award, and it opened doors for Leo that had been closed a half decade earlier. But its impact was dwarfed by that of the raw footage itself. As a filmmaker, Leo fashioned montages that were elaborate and baroque, and employed every device of film rhetoric available to him. He used the film equivalent of counterpoint to generate intersecting waves of images, or the equivalent of Whitmanesque anaphora to layer images on top of one another, giving his work a dense subconscious life. He loved dolly shots and slow pans and production design, and he did delicate and complicated things by varying the focus of his lenses. His mastery at blending sound and image in satisfying ways was absolute. Some of his sound tracks are so interesting that they can stand as independent works of art. He had sharp narrative instincts. A sequence in his 1948 film *Strange Victory* is a model of how film can be used to tell within a few minutes of footage an enormous and complicated story. In what must be an allusion—ironic enough, as it turns out—to the aerial shots at the beginning of Leni Riefenstahl's paean to Hitler,

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Triumph of the Will, we are shown Europe from an American warplane flying toward Germany. Then we are given the war itself, with its unimaginable suffering, distilled into image after image brilliantly edited for rhythm and graphic impact and married to a withering voice-over. The sequence culminates in the rubble of Berlin, where the Russian army is hunting from doorway to doorway for the author of all this grief.

None of the technique apparent in this sequence was available to Leo for the Eichmann trial. Because the Israelis didn't want the bulky television cameras of that era obtruding on the most solemn and serious moment in their national history, rectangular holes had to be cut into the walls of the courtroom to house the equipment. The cameras, limited in mobility and range, couldn't deliver a panoptic vision of the trial, such as the one to be found in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* They weren't, for example, nimble enough to turn in time to capture the explosions of rage and grief from the gallery that punctuated the proceedings during the terrible testimony. Forced to take a fixed view of the events before him, more hemmed in by circumstances—circumstances that were both material and metaphysical—than he had ever been as a filmmaker, Leo still managed to produce some of his best work. He was stationed in a studio across the street from the courthouse, directing his cameramen and taking the live feed and editing it on the spot into a tape that was, at the end of each day, duplicated and put on planes—this was before the era of satellite transmission—bound for Europe and America. He picked out bits of business—Eichmann fiddling with his pen or arranging his papers in his glass booth; Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor, rocking slightly on his heels and turning the pages of his brief with excessive care as he puts questions to the defendant; testy exchanges between Hausner and one of the three judges, who accuses him of overreaching, or incongruously polite and formal ones between a judge and Eichmann—and rendered them with so much clarity that by the contrast between their ordinariness and the events to which they testified, he managed to convey the trial's moral burden.

Leo's presence at the Eichmann trial was an example of his ability—which some might regard as genius and others as evidence that he was a born troublemaker—for finding his way to the center of historically significant events. Because of this gift, his life had some of the density and limpidity of myth. As an undergraduate, he had demonstrated for Sacco and Vanzetti. He had filmed the Hunger March, the Depression-era march on Washington by disaffected First World War veterans, for the Film and Photo League, a collective of young New York radicals committed to using the new visual mediums as engines for political change. He had gone down to Alabama and shot footage of the Scottsboro Boys trial, becoming in the process one of the first of the "outside agitators" of the civil rights movement. *Heart of Spain,* which he and Paul Strand made in

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1938 under the aegis of Frontier Films, was one of the first films about the Spanish civil war. *Native Land,* the next film that they collaborated on, along with, among others, Marc Blitzstein and Paul Robeson, was the landmark labor film of the Depression era. Leo was particularly proud of a sequence in *Native Land*—which was based on the findings of a congressional committee investigating anti-union activities—in which a black sharecropper, wounded on a country road by strikebreakers, is helped to his feet by a white sharecropper. Until that sequence, he said, it was utterly taboo for a white person to touch a black person on film at all, let alone in a gesture of equality and friendship.

Leo was a friend of Woody Guthrie's and had adapted Guthrie's autobiography, *Bound for Glory,* into a never-produced screenplay. He had worked for David O. Selznick and Frank Capra on films supporting the war effort. For Selznick, he had shot footage of Claudette Colbert visiting the troops and posing beside the big guns of a battleship. Charlie Chaplin had put the weight of his then considerable prestige behind the distribution of *Native Land. Strange Victory,* which was about the enduring fact of racism and fascism in the aftermath of the Second World War (not, perhaps, a popular theme in 1948, when postwar relief and exhaustion mingled with incipient Cold War dread), was praised in the *Times* and the *New York Post,* and by Ralph Ellison in the *New Masses.* Leo had made one of the first films about Auschwitz, *The Museum and the Fury,* the masterpiece of his political period. In *Hurwitz et al.* v. *the Directors Guild of America*—a case that was argued and won by the ACLU, and then appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, which refused to hear it, thereby letting the judgment of the lower courts stand—he and his fellow plaintiffs forced the Guild to remove its loyalty oath, making such oaths illegal in nongovernmental organizations. Leo's FBI file, an extensively blacked-out copy of which he had obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, and which he had me sit down and read one afternoon in his kitchen, is enormous. Toward the end of his life, he used to put on a sandwich board and join a picket line in front of a grocery store in his neighborhood.

About a year and a half after we met, Leo asked to read my writing. I'd seen almost all his films, many of them two or three times, stopping by his apartment on my way home from Columbia, where I was an unhappy graduate student in an obscure and dusty department, and sitting on his shabby Danish-modern furniture, by myself or with a few of the other refugees from the counterculture who made up most of his circle in his last years, while he projected his life's work from the Siemens projector in his kitchen onto a screen in his living room. As I waited in the imperfectly darkened room during the reel changes, listening, in an atmosphere heavy with moral earnestness, to his fussing over the projec-

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tor, I sometimes amused myself by imagining that Leo was the Ancient Mariner, and that I was the Wedding Guest, compelled by mysterious powers to hear, and be chastened by, his story. (If I had ever shared this conceit with him, Leo would have responded with an indignant "What does that mean?"—his eye wasn't glittering, it was mild and rational; his beard was a neat goatee; and what, exactly, was the sin here?)

By the time I showed him my work, Leo had decided that he wanted to hear my story, which was generous of him, given the obvious asymmetries between us. I got what I thought were my most political poems together, along with some others, and gave them to him. We met in his kitchen a few days later to discuss them in one of those rituals of reciprocity common to life in New York, with its enormous population of artists, most of whom, like the two of us then, have to rely upon one another for an audience. Leo began by commending, a little ominously, what he called my "verbal carpentry"; and then he told me what he really thought. He said that my political poems were "fatalistic," and that therefore they were examples of self-indulgence rather than the products of an authentic political impulse. He decried what he called my perfectionism, which he said not only was—he actually used this word—"neurotic" but also suggested that I was more concerned with the private pleasure I took in making aesthetically satisfying objects than I was with making a "human" connection, the only thing, ultimately, that justified art. His tone was rational, he expressed his reservations cogently, but I went home on the subway furious. "It's 1988," I said to myself, "and the old guy is accusing me of formalism! Talk about history repeating itself as farce!"

This episode didn't weaken the current of affection between us, but it did rearrange our conversations in subtle ways. I occasionally became subversive, which is something that I regret now. I would challenge him every once in a while with the commonplace, but to him outlandish, graduate-student heresies of the eighties, suggesting, for example, that concepts like "the people" and "humanity," which were a part of his essential vocabulary, were "fictions," and that they acquired their meaning not by reference to "reality"—itself a fiction—but by their place in an invented system of signs. Leo usually hit these weak curve balls out of the park. Once (I really regret this) I told him that I thought that Marx's magnificently indignant chapter in *Capital* on the working day—the sacred text of socialism—was one of the nineteenth century's greatest works of *literature.* He looked silently at me, with infinite compassion, as if I were a citizen of an asylum who had stripped naked and was smearing his body with his own excrement.

For his part, Leo became franker in his assessment of my ideas and tastes. He thought that certain writers I liked—the most prominent being Beckett and Kafka—were "defeatist," and that others, like Gertrude Stein, were irrelevant. He found my enthusiasm and admiration for Gandhi

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slightly deplorable. His quarrel with Gandhi was far more serious than his literary quarrels. It went beyond the fact that, while facing many of the same historical quandaries and occupying the same simplified moral universe, he and Gandhi had arrived at different conclusions. The issues that Gandhi's example posed had twined themselves around Leo's deep psychic structures. Leo's father had been an anarchist in Russia (like any good anarchist dad, he had named Leo after Tolstoy, and he had named Leo's brother Peter after Kropotkin). After migrating to New York at the turn of the century, his father wrote in his spare time for the Yiddish-language anarchist paper *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* (The free voice of labor). There was even some talk that he might become the paper's editor. Later in his life, he became a pacifist-anarchist, of a type similar to Gandhi, and came to despise the Bolshevik revolution. He and Leo quarreled over politics, which must have been hard for them both, because their large family was by all accounts loving and cheerful. So there was always a fragment of subterranean material being worked out when we discussed Gandhi. Leo gave Gandhi his due: that is, he didn't subscribe to the view that Gandhi was a bourgeois politician disguised as a revolutionary—a view prevalent in the Soviet Union before the American military embrace of Pakistan forced India into an uneasy relationship with the Soviets, who, seeing a geopolitical opportunity, moderated their opinions. But he fell in with the general habit of thinking Gandhi softheaded, and probably delusional. He knew about Gandhi's notorious 1938 open letter to the Jews of Germany, advising them to confront the Nazi regime with massive acts of nonviolent disobedience.

"What was that all about?" he asked me.

"I didn't say he wasn't crazy, Leo. Just that he was crazy like a fox."

"He was just crazy. Just plain crazy." Then, after a pause, "You should read Du Bois."

"I've read Du Bois, Leo. I read *The Souls of Black Folk* before most people knew it existed."

"You should read it again. You should read *The Wretched of the Earth* again, too."

These clashes between us never went far. They never led to any rancor. We were too happy for rancor just in talking, while the restlessly acquisitive city flowed around us, about the big, forgotten things—Gandhi; the categorical imperative; the conflict between Marx and Bakunin over the direction of the First International; *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. Once, though, Leo really did get mad at me. In 1989, I went to Pakistan for four months on a fellowship to study Urdu, and then, after traveling around in India, rearranged my ticket and flew back to America by way of Italy. It was the first time I had been to Europe, the home of the famous class struggle, and I returned full of admiration for Rome, and not just for the Rome of the Antonines, or for Renaissance Rome, but also for the Baroque Rome

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of Bernini and the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church. I expressed this admiration in a series of generalities at a dinner party to which Leo and I had both been invited. The Catholic Church, I said, had given Europe a structure by which it could develop its inner life. Europe had gained something from the church that India had never had. All India had was ideas, most of which never went anywhere. Leo was sitting across the room, listening to me. When I finished, he said, "This person, who is a friend of *mine*"—italics can't begin to convey the Testamental wrath that played over his inflection of the word "mine"—"is praising Franco's church."

I didn't dispute this comment, thinking it better to let the matter drop. Looking back now, though, I suspect that Leo would have enjoyed going a few rounds over the Spanish civil war. He and I had what I now realize was an excessively manly friendship. We didn't stop to hash out the thorny issues. They carried too much emotional weight. We stayed on the high ground, and each of us thought the other preferred it that way. We never discussed the nonaggression pact between Hitler and Stalin, or the show trials of the thirties, or the slave-labor camps. We never talked about the Popular Front. We never had a conversation about the 1905 revolution, when for a brief moment Trotsky held power in St. Petersburg equal to the czar's. About the chasms that developed in the New York Left of the thirties, and the sectarian conflicts between Stalinists, anti-Stalinists, Trotskyites, anti-Communists, anti-anti-Communists, premature anti-Fascists, Socialists, mere liberals, and so forth, we never said a word. I was curious about his attitudes toward this turbulence, since it had played a part—one generation removed—in shaping the principles and habits of mind of many of my teachers, acquaintances, and friends. But the tacit agreement at the beginning of our friendship was that Leo, largely if not exclusively, would let his work speak for him. And I continued to honor this agreement long after our relationship had outgrown it, because he had a tragic grandeur for me which I felt it would be an impertinence to violate merely to satisfy my curiosity. Recently, though, while reflecting on the years in which I knew him, I've realized, with a certain remorse, that Leo could well have interpreted my tact as a silent judgment, and my discretion as an indication that I believed he had something to hide. I didn't believe he had something to hide, and in fact he had nothing to hide.

Leo and I did, though, have one exchange about Stalin, the albatross that had been hung around his neck. In the spring of 1990, he learned that he had an advanced stage of colon cancer. After an operation, a course of chemotherapy was prescribed. I used to drive him to his sessions, every other week, at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, in Washington Heights, and sit beside him in a big room overlooking the Hudson while he lay back in a recliner as preposterous chemicals dripped into his body. During one of those drives to the hospital, I told him that I'd been reading Bertram Wolfe's *Three Who Made a Revolution,* an old but service-

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able book about the Bolshevik leaders. Leo said he knew the book. I then said, apropos of nothing, "Trotsky was a real Romantic, wasn't he?"

"Stalin was a Romantic, too," Leo replied immediately.

"Leo," I said, stating the obvious out of sequence, "you would have been one of the first people that Stalin came after."

Cancer-ridden and exhausted, he looked out the car window in silence.

I've dreamed about Leo twice in the past months, and both dreams have had the allegorical force that dreams have in the epic poems. Their meanings lie open on their surfaces and are almost too readily available. Both take place in the present. In the first dream, which I've been told resembles dreams common to people who have lost friends or loved ones—and which was the dream that prompted me to turn on my laptop and begin writing this piece—Leo is still alive, living as he did in his last months, when he was too tired to dress and would receive visitors in his bathrobe. It turns out, though, that I've stopped going to see him, and have failed to return his phone calls. My wife, who has kept up the connection, tells me that he has been asking after me and wondering what I'm working on. Racked by guilt, I finally call him up and visit. He greets me affectionately, and we sit on the Danish-modern furniture and listen to a new LP of Bach's *Musical Offering,* his favorite piece of music. I go home feeling guilty and defiant.

In the second dream, Leo and Nelly and I are in a plane at JFK waiting to take off for Jerusalem, where Leo will videotape the Eichmann trial and Nelly and I will act as his assistants—carrying his bags, fetching him Chinese food and Samuel Adams beer, which Leo likes because Adams was an authentic radical and a man after his own heart. The plane is so crowded with businessmen, families with small children, and students with backpacks that some of us will have to make the trip standing up. It is also very hot. Air-traffic congestion has kept us on the Tarmac for hours, and the air conditioners have remained off. Nelly and I talk; Leo looks out the window. Then, as we get clearance to go and the plane begins taxiing down the runway, I suddenly remember that in an hour I have a lunch appointment in Manhattan with a famous literary figure. Frantic to get off the plane, thinking that if I can jump out and sprint to a taxi stand I can make it back to midtown in time, I run up and down the aisle shouting for a flight attendant.

When we weren't looking at his films, Leo and I went to museums, which were an inspiration for some of his best filmmaking. They incited the act of remembering, an act that for him was both political and personal; they were a reminder of the human struggle. We visited all of New York's great collections, but we found ourselves most often at the

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Metropolitan, usually in the late morning. After sampling the Chola bronzes and the sarcophagi, the armor and the musical instruments, the Persian miniatures and the arcana of the Indonesian archipelago, we would eat lunch and then make our way upstairs to the European paintings, circling through room after room of masterpieces until we came to the Dutch rooms, where Leo would linger before Rembrandt's portrait of himself in his old age. It was a painting Leo could never get enough of, with its expression of pride and self-awareness and regret and wisdom and disappointment.

The last time we went to visit a work of art together was in the summer of 1990. He had finished his chemotherapy—the prognosis wasn't good—and he and Nelly had rented a house in Vermont, near the town where, almost thirty years earlier, he had collaborated with Manny on *Essay on Death*, a film meditation occasioned by the first anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. "We'll go see the Orozco murals"—the paintings that the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco had put on the walls of a room of the Baker Library, at Dartmouth College, when he was an artist-in-residence there from 1932 to 1934—Leo told me when he invited me to visit. He was insistent about this excursion, mentioning it each time I talked to him on the phone in the intervening weeks.

The day after I got to Vermont, we took the drive over the spectacular mountains to Hanover. He hadn't described the murals to me, but as we drove he was displaying a barely suppressed excitement, like that of a child about to spring a surprise. Orozco's murals occupy the walls of the Baker Library's reserve room, on the ground floor, which—the Dartmouth summer session being still under way—was filled with students sitting at the long tables working at anthropology and computer science and the Thirty Years' War. The impact of Orozco's prophetic exuberance wasn't in the least mitigated by their incongruous background noise or by the fact, equally incongruous, that his images are to be found in a beautiful New England town, on a green and pleasant college campus where, that day, outside, stately Greek Revival buildings were lying mostly empty and supine under the August heat. Leo came up to me as I was wandering through the room and said, "I think they're the greatest things on this continent."

Orozco called his murals *The Epic of American Civilization.* Moving clockwise from the wall opposite the door through which you enter the room, they depict, in a continuous visual narrative made coherent by the repetition and transformation of motifs, colors, and compositional strategies, the migration of the Aztecs to Central Mexico; the rituals of human sacrifice at the heart of the totalitarian Aztec state; the arrival of the Aztec redeemer Quetzalcoatl; the arrival of Cortés, painted as if he were an El Greco and accompanied by the Cross; the subjugation of the Aztecs; the subsequent subjugation of the New World, which is represented in image

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after image of undiluted graphic power. Leo would join me as I was looking at one or another of the panels, and point out little felicities of handling and composition, or praise Orozco's ability to synthesize influences ranging from Blake and Marx to the painters of the High Renaissance.

After a while, we made our way together to the last image, which is to the left of the door as you enter the reserve room. Because of the way the room was laid out and because of the striations of strong summer light filtering through the windows, this final image seemed that day to be receding into the shadows. Orozco's last image is his vision of the Crucifixion. Christ, huge, dominating the pictorial space, has come down off the Cross, which lies fallen behind Him—His feet, planted firmly on the ground, straddle one of its arms. His powerfully emaciated body is painted in hallucinatory blues and reds and yellows. His face is the face of the Pantokrator of the Byzantine icons, the world ruler who appears at the end of time bringing not peace but a sword. His right arm holds an ax, downward, and is itself stretched downward at a forty-five-degree angle; His left arm is raised, and the hand is making a fist. Behind Him, discarded in a great junk heap, lie the tanks and cannons and howitzers of the world, along with a golden Buddha, a broken Ionic column, and a fragment of an Aphrodite. Leo and I stared at this image for many minutes while people came in and went out the door, stood up and sat down at the tables, and opened and closed books and notebooks. The minutes began to grow longer and longer; the time came for Leo to speak. This was what he had brought me here to see, and as I waited for him to say something, I could sense that, theatrical to the end, he was elongating the moment, and savoring it. He rocked back on his heels a little; his long, fine head swiveled from side to side. Finally, he spoke. "Look," Leo said—his tone was matter-of-fact, craftsmanlike, appreciative—"He's chopped down the Cross."

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Never Trust a Memoirist

Ben Franklin and the Autobiography

STACY SCHIFF

Over the summer of 1771, in the garden study of a handsome brick home in the south of England, Benjamin Franklin sat down to write a few pages about his life to date. He was a houseguest, in a stately and comfortable establishment, surrounded by an adopted family of admirers. Two weeks stretched long and leisurely before him. He did not live, as we do, in an autobiographical age. Rousseau's *Confessions* were still a decade in the future; the word *autobiography* was no more part of Franklin's vocabulary than that of his learned host, Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph. Franklin wrote quickly and easily, initially without an outline. The revisions came much later. He was a sixty-five-year-old newspaperman, scientist, and colonial representative, and by the end of his Hampshire stay he had written nearly half of the pages that would compose the story of his life.

We can infer something of the kind of houseguest he made—three days of Franklin would by no means have invited analogies with spoiling fish—from his punctual bread-and-butter note. When he left Hampshire, he returned the youngest of the bishop's five daughters to her London school; in his letter to his hostess he stinted on no details of their coach conversation. Talk was awkward at first, until Franklin and Kitty began marrying off the Shipley sisters. The matchmakers settled on an earl for Anna Maria, a duke for Amelia, a sensible merchant for Betsy, a country

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gentleman for Georgiana, and a seasoned old general for Kitty herself. (What actually became of the Shipley girls was material well worthy of Jane Austen—another Hampshire clergyman's daughter, born twenty miles away, four years after Franklin's post chaise had rattled off into the distance.) It is difficult to imagine another gentleman in his sixties who would have labored so valiantly to humor an eleven-year-old when he might have pulled out a good book instead; it is even more difficult to imagine one who would have reported with such spirit on the details of the conversation. But this one understood the gravity of such matters. He had spent some part of his two-week holiday meditating on his own early years; he had broken off his narrative after an account of his own marriage. Nor was Franklin a man made lonely by his intelligence.

Four summers later, when the memory of that garden study still burned bright, Franklin dispatched a very different kind of letter to Hampshire. He had returned from England to find "all America from one end of the twelve united Provinces, to the other, busily employed in learning the use of arms." Offering himself up as thermometer, he explained the level of engagement: "You see I am warm; and if a temper naturally cool and phlegmatic can, in old age, which often cools the warmest, be thus heated, you will judge by that of the general temper here, which is now little short of madness." By the time he again sat down to devote himself to his unfinished manuscript, thirteen years had elapsed. The world had changed, and so had Franklin. By 1784 he was a national hero, the illustrious European minister of a newly independent country. His time was not his own, and the spirit in which the work was begun—that of a leisurely summer holiday—was far from that in which it was continued. The sprightliness, the gleam of the first pages are conspicuously absent from those that follow.

By November 1786 Franklin had made a little progress, but not until after the Constitution was signed in 1788 was he truly back on the job, adding Part III, the longest single section, to the manuscript. The kind of octogenarian who might perform a spontaneous midnight experiment with a ticking watch, he looked forward to completing the text before year's end. Reality conspired against him, as did temperament. "For my own part, everything of difficult discussion, and that requires close attention of mind and an application of long continuance, grows rather irksome to me; and where there is not some absolute necessity for it, as in the settlement of accounts or the like, I am apt to indulge the indolence usually attending age, in postponing such business from time to time, though continually resolving to do it," he had explained much earlier, as fine a procrastinator's credo as has been composed. In 1790—emaciated, largely confined to bed, indebted to opium, having written his will—he added another seven and a half pages. And then broke off again, definitively. It is one of the great ironies of the piece that a work extolling

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industry and diligence above all other virtues should have remained incomplete.

It is also true that the pages we have come to know as the seminal formulation of the American dream were half of them written abroad, where they saw their first publication in France. The *Autobiography*'s publishing history is a tortured one. The first pages to appear in English did not do so until three years after Franklin's death, and then in a retranslation from the French. Swedish and German copies had preceded them. An edition corresponding to the manuscript was published only in 1868. All of which is perhaps appropriate for a deeply secular work begun in a bishop's house and addressed to an illegitimate son. The difficulty may lie in the title, obviously not of its author's manufacture, and a kind of false advertising; to our day the fragmentary volume perhaps better qualifies as "Memoirs of a Dysfunctionally Functional Man." Through its pages we hear of Franklin's pathologically energetic exploits, his founding of a library, a fire brigade, a police force, a hospital, a sanitation department, an academy, an insurance company, a militia. He is a one-man Boy Scout troop, booster club, benefit committee. He is a single-handed civilization. Which begs the question: Is the book true to its name? Are these pages—the only autobiographical ones left to us by that most slippery of the founding fathers, whose name hauls behind it the most impressive fleet of predicate nominatives in American history—true at all?

The autobiographer has been said to resemble the stripper; the suspense, argues V. S. Pritchett, comes in wondering how much he will reveal. Franklin, it should be remembered, hailed from Boston. He has provoked the wrath and mistrust of historians for what seems a masterfully coy act indeed. From the age of fifteen he had been assembling an elaborate wardrobe of personae, and the Ben Franklin of the *Autobiography* takes his place alongside Anthony Afterwit, Alice Addertongue, and Cecilia Shortface. He was above all a man of the press; he was never above orchestrating a little public relations effort. Perhaps most dangerously, he had a sense of humor. In what might appear the squeakiest-clean dance of the veils around, he wrote his own way into the history books. In that primary version of American history by which Abe Lincoln squints in the firelight and George Washington decapitates the cherry tree, Franklin makes his bedraggled entry into Philadelphia with his three fat and yeasty rolls, a scene now read as legend at best, fiction at worst. The scene—the arrival of the penniless urchin in the great metropolis, intent on making his fortune, with nothing in his favor but his wits—is worthy of Dickens, but Franklin got there first. And he returns there, three times, in his narrative. To his mind the rise from poverty and obscurity began that first Sunday morning in Philadelphia, with the great puffy rolls. The celebrated entry drives home the theme of the *Autobiography*, which hap-

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pens, on a far grander scale, also to be that of the life. It is about defying one's parents. It is all about running away from home.

Did Franklin manufacture the moment? He certainly toyed with it, placing his future wife at the scene in an ingenious narrative twist, one that happens to tax our author's credibility. More worrisome is the fact that elsewhere he mentions having arrived in Philadelphia "at 9 o'clock in the evening," not a likely hour at which to be parading about the streets with the most famous fresh-baked goods in American literature under one's arm. But memories fail, including Ben Franklin's, and even allowing for a little creative scene-setting the fact remains that the somewhat obstreperous, highly ambitious, and entirely prospectless Franklin *arrived in Philadelphia in 1723, at the age of seventeen, and there made* good. About the rolls there is less reason to be suspicious. Franklin—who claims in these pages to have been unable to remember what he had dined upon the night before; a man who, if taken at his word, owed his early education to his rapt indifference to food, spending on books what his colleagues spent on dinner—turns out also to have been a man who kept a recipe file.

But let us leave the puffy rolls aside. A letter from his mother to our author speaks as eloquently as anything on the subject of who he was, where he came from, and where he went. In 1751, Abiah Franklin wrote to the youngest son among her ten children: "I am glad to hear that you are so well respected in your toun for them to chuse you alderman alltho I dont know what it means nor what the better you will be of it besides the honer of it." Mrs. Franklin's line lends a whole new meaning—an original meaning—to the term *self-made.* On Franklin's entry into Philadelphia in 1785, cannon boomed and bells pealed. Crowds followed him "with acclamations quite to my door." The welcome occupied the better part of a week. But this part Franklin never wrote. Always the philanthropist, he left his greatest years to his biographers.

Indeed one of the most striking things about the *Autobiography* is that—a function of the Shipleys' fine hospitality, or by express design?—the volume focuses as amply as it does on childhood. We learn a great deal more about the shenanigans of Franklin's print shop colleagues than we do about American history. Whether this means that we learn a great deal about Franklin himself is a matter of some debate. By today's standards in particular, he falls hopelessly short on the soul-baring front; he has been hailed as "the only person in American history without an unconscious." And it is true that this volume is devoid of all the qualities with which modern memoir bursts, the qualities that would seem to impel a person to compose one in the first place: self-aggrandizement, self-pity, self-justification, self-consciousness, self-reflection, self-delusion. It is not even particularly narcissistic. There are flashes of pride: Franklin managed to fold an advertisement for his pages into the volume itself,

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"worth all of Plutarch." The man who helped to jettison one does not refrain from reminding us that he has consorted with kings. We have the famous "errata." And Franklin is as fine an observer of human nature as we can name; he is our most eminent lay psychologist. But those in search of a man plumbing his inner life will be disappointed. This was, after all, the star pupil who learned he would be removed from grammar school when he overheard his father telling friends as much, rather than enlightening the astute nine-year-old directly. So Franklin informs us without inflection. Today we have words for this kind of thing.

While Franklin may not delve into his own psyche, the personality seeps out everywhere on the page. He—or at least his younger self—is impertinent and disputatious, callous and stubborn. He informs us that he has been found by a friend to be "overbearing and insolent." He will battle his pride as long as he lives, and if ever he prevails is resigned to the fact that he will crow about his victory. Order is not his forte. He is a champion scorekeeper, an expert manipulator, a merciless rival, an opportunist of the first rank. He breaks hearts. He is a disobedient son; he rubs his brother's face in his success. He is not above seducing his best friend's girl. Which explains why this hymn to industry, temperance, and frugality amounts all the same to one very lively read. It is no drudge's diary. As for the missing unconscious, it is true that Franklin was not Montaigne. But then again, Montaigne was a stay-at-home.

Among Franklin's omissions, none—including that of his own soul—is more vexing than the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the son to whom the *Autobiography* is, at least in part, at least nominally, addressed. At the time of Franklin's Hampshire holiday, William Franklin was forty years old, advantageously married, and the royal governor of New Jersey. He was in no need of a primer on self-improvement. Consequently he has been dismissed as a literary device, a ruse by which Franklin could establish an easy intimacy with his reader. This may or may not have been his intention; certainly as late as 1786—when politics had definitively divided the two men—Franklin described the work as a set of notes written for William, not as a memoir. Yet what kind of parent composes a letter to his child in which the child's arrival on the scene goes unremarked? Here Franklin indulges in what might be termed more a magician's than a stripper's act, diverting his audience with one ploy while elsewhere working another. And so we learn of various peccadilloes without ever hearing of what would seem the most visible, the most indelible blot on the record: The fathering of an illegitimate child (who by the time of that Hampshire holiday had himself sired an illegitimate son) during the same fruitful season that Franklin courted his wife. Al Capone and his stunning tax irregularities come inevitably to mind. The narrator of the *Autobiography* is a yet more cunning fellow even than its protagonist. The self-made man is one, after all, who has fabricated a self.

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Can the greatness of a book be measured by the width and breadth of its readings? The *Autobiography* has been introduced by Woodrow Wilson, repudiated by Thoreau, dissected by Hawthorne and Melville, burlesqued by Edgar Allan Poe, undermined by William Carlos Williams, emulated by Henry Adams, derided by D. H. Lawrence, celebrated by Somerset Maugham, savored by Kafka, cited by everyone from P. T. Barnum to Lee Iacocca. Franklin was famously many-sided, and there are few sides from which he, and his memoir, have not been approached. His pages have been read as a recapitulation of the trauma an infant experiences when weaned from the breast, as the confessions of a man racked by guilt for having surpassed his father, as a tale of sibling rivalry. Some think Franklin wrote too much; others despair that he wrote too little. The *Autobiography* is the greatest and most enduring historical work published in America; it is vastly overrated. Franklin is too secular, he is too religious, he is too calculating, he is a simpleton. The pages are brilliantly constructed; they lack unity.

What remains undeniable is that the *Autobiography* is part and parcel of American history. Davy Crockett carried one volume with him to the Alamo, and it was Franklin's; the *Autobiography* proved a pivotal tome in the lives of banker Thomas Mellon and industrialist Andrew Carnegie, fellow pilgrims on the rags-to-riches trail. Occasionally Franklin has even been met on his own terms. "When I was a child I had to boil soap, notwithstanding my father was wealthy, and I had to get up early and study geometry at breakfast, and peddle my own poetry, and do everything just as Franklin did, in the solemn hope that I would be a Franklin some day. And here I am," moaned that great unknown, Mark Twain, perhaps the only American writer whose cheek was quite as accommodating to the tongue as Franklin's. Out of Franklin's overcoat tumble Huck Finn and Sammy Glick, Jay Gatsby and George F. Babbitt. His is the success story that trumps all success stories. Who else so valiantly maintained his faith in the perfectibility of man while expounding on the flaws in the raw material? Between reason and inclination, Franklin the lapsed vegetarian makes clear, there is no contest. He is our most earnest satirist, our most idealistic utilitarian. We have him to thank as well for that eminently American character, the sugar-busting one-minute manager who wins thin-thighed friends and influences highly effective people in thirty days. The story goes that Marie Antoinette, inquiring after Franklin's background, learned that America's ambassador was the proprietor of a printing house. "In France he could never have risen to be higher than a bookseller," quipped a courtier. It was a valid point, as Franklin himself well knew. He could have been a nobody. Had he been born in Paris, we might never have heard his name. Which is only half the story. Had he been born in Paris, America would have been born differently too.

Most books fall short of their author's aspirations; the *Autobiography* is

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a volume that falls short of its author's projections. Had all gone according to plan, its last pages would have concerned themselves with the peace negotiations of 1783, not his arrival in England in 1757. We would have a weightier, shapelier, more cohesive text, one better able to stave off the critics. The perfect ending is one supplied elsewhere, in a letter Franklin addressed to a member of his son's generation, from France, during the dark days of the Revolution. With warmth, he wrote George Washington: "I must soon quit this scene, but you may live to see our country flourish, as it will amazingly and rapidly after the war is over: like a field of young Indian corn, which long fair weather and sunshine had enfeebled and discoloured, and which, in that weak state, by a thunder-gust of violent wind, hail, and rain seemed to be threatened with absolute destruction; yet the storm being past, it recovers fresh verdure, shoots up with double vigour, and delights the eye, not of its owner only but of every observing traveller."

Here is the rhapsodic windup of the man who left a parched Boston to be reconstituted in Philadelphia; this is Franklin through and through. The nobility of spirit, the ease with words, the vision, the earthy wisdom, the clear-eyed faith in a rising people are all there. And there is something else too. The wily old performer delivers his valediction. And then occupies the stage for another decade.

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Tide

SUSAN DONNELLY

If I don't catch it
right now, the look of the bay
at the lowest tide,
with the sun stamping on it,
the uncovered sand like clay,

if I let it go
for some more important thing,
or just look away
for a bit, mean to note it
when I've first done something else,

only my mind's eye
will be left to remember,
when the tide has turned,
how the whole bay looked
like a great shell lying there—

all blue, brown, silver
and how I needed to shape
something I could hold
and keep, maybe, from those few
moments before it all changed.

Susan Donnelly, the author of *Eve Names the Animals,* has a new poetry collection, *Transit*, forthcoming from Iris Press. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Northampton

DANIEL AARON

Northampton courthouse, September 1960. I am sitting with my colleague, mentor, and friend Newton Arvin, who is one of three members of the Smith College faculty charged with possessing pornography. I recall a large space, the unimpressive judge seated on a daïs in his robes, faceless clerks and stenographers, a sprinkling of gawkers. There must have been reporters and photographers in the chamber, but I don't remember them.

What I do remember is the tense and white-faced defendant, the feeling of having been plunked down in an alien space, the piles of "obscene" magazines stacked on a table below the judge's bench, the droning voice stating the charges, and my sense that none of the defenders or prosecutors relished his assignment. The man on trial was no stranger to the town, no shoddy bum. He was a Smith College professor—a respectable figure well known to local merchants and shopkeepers, doctors, and bank officials. A walker of Northampton streets, he seldom went bareheaded and was always well groomed, his suits pressed, his ties discreet, his shoes shined. He was immensely polite, a hat-tipper. He wore rubbers when it rained, and looked and behaved at times like Caspar Milquetoast; but he took tremendous risks when out cruising, or checking the men's rooms in Springfield bus stations.

For a timorous man, he was a bold thinker. That was detectable, I thought, in his decisive handwriting. I never tried to sort out his contradictions, much less reconcile them, but comprehended him in toto, a rare

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creature—fearful, rash, selfish, generous, tender, petty, candid, and secretive, an intrepid intellectual explorer disguised as a timid soul. He was also a consummate tutor, monitor, and critic, and a storehouse of extractable learning. My services to him were much more pedestrian. I relieved him of some academic chores, took over his classes when he was ill or away, and ferried him to hospitals after some of his consciously bungled suicide attempts. I believe he was genuinely fond of me and appreciated my solicitude, but my literary gaucheries must have grated on him, and I could feel a sting in his mild rebukes.

Arvin was serious but unsolemn, his humor droll rather than uproarious. He had an eye or ear for the ludicrous. His prime targets were likely to be specimens of the fauna of the academy—"our contemporary Scholastics and Dryasdusts," with "no more notion of what literature is all about than a mole has of astronomy." They made him, he said, "eager to be 'impressionistic,' 'intuitional,' 'appreciative,' 'unsystematic,' and all the other sins of their tight little Eliotine decalogue." Long after his literary horizons had spread beyond those of Van Wyck Brooks, his first model, Brooks remained for him "the only man we have who can tell off the pedants."

By the late 1940s, Arvin had soured on "the hard-boiled or the 'objective' or tough-minded school of my generation" and had come to feel "infinitely more at home" with younger writers like the lyrical Gothicist Carson McCullers and the "wonderfully gifted youth named Truman Capote," a tropical bird who for a short time flew in and out of Northampton. Respecting my diffidence, he rarely spoke of liaisons with his young lovers, but took pains to remind me that the word *gay* now could mean something other than "cheerful" and "merry." I think he believed that at bottom, every man would recognize his latent homosexuality if he dug deep enough into his nature.

I hadn't known—as I sat in the courtroom on Main Street and glowered at the meaty-faced Sergeant John T. Regan, chief of the "pornography unit" of the Massachusetts State Police—that the police raid on Newton Arvin's flat had been a spin-off of a "Stamp Out Smut" campaign launched by President Eisenhower's postmaster general, Arthur E. Summerville. A state law passed in 1959 had changed an obscenity offense from a misdemeanor to a felony, and had given the state police the power to set up a bureau to ferret out and prosecute "pornographers." This legislation had enabled Sergeant Regan and his men to break into Arvin's apartment on Prospect Street and ransack his files in search of obscene material.

A long and interesting history lay behind the Commonwealth's efforts to protect its citizens from moral pollution. The state commissioner of safety, J. Henry Goguen, and Sergeant Regan were only the latest of Massachusetts' public guardians to protect the mental weal of the public. They pictured themselves as kindly and welcome redeemers. Here were all these educated people, Regan confided to reporters—college professors and the like, who knew they were doing wrong and were often relieved

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when they got caught, because their detection ended the haunting fear of blackmail. Most of the delinquents, said Regan, were humbled and ashamed. All the more important, then, that the investigators carry on their therapeutic work disinterestedly and with pity. The sergeant certainly had a model, if ungrateful, lawbreaker in Newton Arvin, whom he first scared to death and then got to implicate his gay friends. I knew nothing about Newton's singing to the police, but even if I had, I would have been too familiar with his anxieties and terrors to condemn his admittedly craven behavior.

Not to be minimized in this sorry tale is the conspiratorial atmosphere of the times—the McCarthyist fog that had settled thickly over the Republic. In the mind of the Wisconsin senator, or at any rate in his public utterances, Communism and homosexuality were kindred diseases. Newton had had reason to worry that an exhumation of his early radical associations might inadvertently turn up evidence that he was gay—perhaps the reason why he had deplored my agreement to write a history of the literary Left. No doubt there were other other reasons as well. This was no time to remind the locals that one of them had contributed to magazines that were "soft on Communism," or to fuel the animus of those citizens who still blamed the college for keeping industry out of the city, ostensibly to safeguard what the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* once referred to as Smith College's annual yield of "polished virginity." To these suspicious Northamptonians, Smith was not only a roosting place for liberals and worse, but hoity-toity as well; and it must be acknowledged that students and faculty alike sometimes acted as if they were a privileged autonomous power. Newton Arvin never did so, but in the end his studied self-effacement couldn't avert an unsought notoriety.

Until the all-male colleges and universities admitted women (against the dwindling resistance of a good many diehards), Smith and its sister institutions—Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Barnard, Wellesley, Radcliffe—were the complements of the Ivy League men's colleges. Each had its alleged character: Vassar, debutantish-artistic-literary; Bryn Mawr and Radcliffe, serious-scholarly; Mount Holyoke, clergymanish-mousy; Wellesley, socially safe and respectable; Barnard, dun-colored and nondescript; Smith, politically and sexually liberal, and least regional of the "Seven Sisters."

Smith had less of the picture-postcard "ivy" look than many New England colleges. It spread over a low elevation above the town center, a few miles west of the usually well-behaved Connecticut River and safe from its occasional flooding. Smith was also pretty, unpretentious, and latitudinarian. William Allan Neilson, one of the last of the great college presidents, was about to retire in 1939, the year of my arrival. A respected scholar and wit, he was labeled a Communist (along with Eleanor Roosevelt) in crazy Elizabeth Dilling's notorious survey, *The Red Network,* and he had enraged

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many Northampton citizens by permitting Smith students to demonstrate against the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. What is more, he had appointed "known socialists" and far too many foreigners to the faculty. (One could hear a lot of French, Italian, and German—the last the first language of Mrs. Neilson—spoken on Main Street.) Thanks to President Neilson and his politics, Smith College, as compared with nearby Amherst College, was raffishly international. It was also competently, some would say parsimoniously, managed.

The majority of Smith students, as in other private women's colleges, came from comfortable and conservative backgrounds and tended to grow piously open-minded between their freshman and senior years. A scattering of "radicals" leavened the student lump, but their protests were more likely to be social than political. A few unserious but clubby societies might provoke mild dissent on occasion, but little rancor, for the college was too large and diverse and tolerant to sustain bitter divisions. The students, still quartered in comfortable, mostly Victorian houses, might have been members of an extended family. African-Americans—not all that many, by current standards—were well received, for the most part, and were sometimes aggressively coerced into taking high office. Women as different as Betty Friedan, Jane White, Gloria Steinem, Victoria Schrager, Sylvia Plath, and Aileen Ward graduated from Smith during my tenure, not one of them "typical," yet each in her way a product of the college.

If collectively unastonishing, Smith women were hardheaded, resourceful, practical, and disciplined (or so they seemed to me at that time), and less romantic and sentimental than their men friends, who more often than not were impervious to irony and less adroit in combining their academic and social business. Smith "girls" turned into women faster than the "boys" they dated and married turned into men, and the best of them positively glittered as they performed their assignments. Yet these same confident students accepted what had not yet been called male hegemony without noticeable protest, showed little interest in the history of their sex, and adapted themselves to the assumptions and values of their clunky consorts. It was hard to square their aptitudes and intelligence with their passion for engagement rings. Once, in a moment of exasperation, Newton Arvin peevishly called them tarts; but more than a few, he conceded, were remarkable. One can only speculate on the social costs of the "feminine mystique" that conditioned so many gifted women to their comfortable purdahs.

The telegram inviting me to teach at Smith (salary, $2,250) was delivered on a spring day in 1939. I was then an instructor and Ph.D. candidate at Harvard. Our Marxist study group had just concluded one of its unsystematic sessions, and I read the message aloud to my fellow adepts in a ha-ha-what-a-preposterous-notion tone of voice. Our discussion leader, Granville Hicks (then literary editor of the Communist *New Masses,* but

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during that year one of Harvard's "Counselors in American Civilization"), told me not to be silly. Smith was a special place, and I was lucky to be asked. He had once taught there, and Newton Arvin, his Harvard classmate and one of my favorite literary critics, still did.

In 1939, women continued to make up a slight majority of the Smith faculty. The eldest pioneers of the profession, they tended to be hard on themselves, not overly protective of their sisters, undeferential to their male colleagues, and models for their students. The triple names of these teachers and scholars seemed as set in bronze as those of the male professors. They challenged the old maid stereotype, resolutely kept abreast of the "new," and although decorous themselves, were unflummoxed by the indecorous. "I have lived, Dan—oh, I've lived," Esther Cloudman Dunn once said to me as she angled successfully to obtain what was still called the chairmanship of the English department. She was no Wife of Bath, but I believed her.

A trio of other women I came to know pretty well are emblematic of that time and place.

What turned into a long and affectionate friendship began shortly after I found myself the only male teaching a section in Mary Ellen Chase's introductory course in English composition. At the end of our first staff meeting, she invited the "girls" to join her for a Coke. (I associate that day with a tortuous hunt for the room marked GENTLEMEN, cunningly concealed under a stairway in the basement of the William Allen Neilson Library.) Miss Chase lived in a white, box-shaped New England cottage on Paradise Road with Eleanor Duckett, her longtime friend, a graduate of Cambridge University and a professor of classics. Miss Chase wasn't that kind of scholar. She wrote popular fiction and nonfiction, which she invariably pooh-poohed, for a substantial company of fans and for substantial sums of money. "Don't you dare read it!" she would say about some piece soon to appear in *Reader's Digest.*

I never dared to call Miss Chase Mary, as some of my younger colleagues did, but somehow she made me feel cherished and important, a key member of her faction. I think she felt I brought some credit to the college that over the years had become an extension of herself, hence our felt but unstated incorporation. She told me stories about her Maine childhood, and of her young womanhood in Madison, Wisconsin, and of her dislike for Frank Lloyd Wright. (I gathered that he had once made a pass at her, which she had indignantly rejected. Perhaps he was attracted by the virginal prettiness she still retained when I knew her.) Letters in my M. E. Chase file describe a sojourn at Cambridge University (she was studying Hebrew in preparation for her widely read book on the Bible as literature), her trips to France and Spain, and a memorable account of a weekend with the Aga Khan in the Maritime Alps. (I had asked her to write to me about the man who had himself periodically weighed on a scale balanced

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with sacks of diamonds, or so it was said, and she did.) These and other letters betray Miss Chase in all her innocence, vanity, enthusiasm, goodness, and generosity. Her pomposities were angelic. Comfortable in the houses of her rich admirers, the Rockefellers and the Morrows among them, she was pleased to discover sterling qualities in her hosts that palliated the dubiousness of their lucre.

Off and on, she summoned me to her house for ritual breakfasts. After she had hustled Miss Duckett, whom she lovingly exploited, off to the library, we would hash over departmental matters and national politics. Usually we were in accord, her rock-ribbed Republican origins notwithstanding; she was conscientiously "liberal" and opposed to what she thought I opposed and scorned. Both of us supported Adlai Stevenson for president, but Miss Chase audibly wondered what he could possibly see in that Dorothy Fosdick, a member of Smith's government department and daughter of a prominent New York clergyman. Miss Chase hinted that she had information about this shadowy affair, but she never divulged any of it to me. She was less reserved about her hostility to the Luce magazines and to the Congressional investigators who were rooting up the radical pasts of a few Smith College professors. Newton Arvin awed her, or at least his reputation did. Very likely she had heard more about his private pastimes than she cared to know, yet she respected my respect for him. (Not so the queenly Shakespearean, Esther Cloudman Dunn, who intimated that Newton was my Iago.)

Mina (Kirstein) Curtis was worldlier than her seniors or peers in the college. She had been a student at Smith in the closing years of the First World War. In the early 1920s, after the death of her husband (to whom she continued to write letters, which were published in *The Atlantic Monthly*), she joined the faculty. Thereafter she inspired gossip and speculation. Student lore had it that she had kept a black panther as a pet, a rumor she did nothing to discourage. After all, she wasn't your ordinary lady professor. For one thing, she was rich. Her father owned a Boston department store, and she could easily afford to live stylishly, dress expensively, travel where and when she pleased. She was an indecorous bluestocking, a friend and summer neighbor of Archibald MacLeish. Through her brother, Lincoln Kirstein, co-founder of the quarterly *Hound & Horn*, she met many of the journal's avant-garde contributors.

During my first two years in Northampton, Mina introduced me to Wystan Auden (who heard me lecture on Randolph Bourne to her class and advised me to read Kierkegaard) and to Aline Bernstein, the former inamorata of Thomas Wolfe, alluringly portrayed as Esther Jack in his novel *You Can't Go Home Again*. Mina herself figured in that saga of rich and worldly New Babylonians. It was no secret at Smith that she bowed in and out of Esther Jack's party as Lily Mandell, the "heiress of Midas wealth," a "dark statuesque" beauty with "heavy-lidded eyes" whose "tall

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and voluptuous figure" seemed "literally to have been poured" into her magnificent gown.

The Mina who befriended me in the early 1940s didn't look at all like Wolfe's sultry houri, but she retained something of her youthful, generous, and vulnerable self. She had, as she wrote thirty years later, fulfilled "one of those adolescent fantasies in which one imagines oneself in the center of some romantic yet realistically perceived scene—the 'Belle of the Ball' in short." She was living that fantasy when I first met her. Like many forceful and ambitious people, Mina totally lacked self-irony. She distrusted her own modest gifts, moved in high-toned circles, alluded to her romantic adventures, and cultivated the eminent and the well connected. In time she became a pastiche of the grand people she had known, a kind of Sargasso Sea.

Mina Curtis had just quit the Northampton scene when Elizabeth Drew, a slim, handsome Englishwoman with a manner just a touch chilly and a comic sensibility like Jane Austen's, began her long stint at Smith in the fall of 1942. We had first met a year earlier at the Middlebury Summer School of English. Separated from her husband, a Cambridge don, Elizabeth brought her young son to the States to escape the Blitz. She was teaching at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, when a sun-blinded truck driver ran over her son and killed him. "No, there isn't anything to say," she replied to my letter. "One has to remind one's self one is one of millions in the same situation—& that there are also many millions of women who would give anything for the 14 years I had. It makes no difference to the heartbreak but keeps me from self-pity."

She was the star lecturer that summer at Middlebury, among a faculty that included John Crowe Ransom, Donald Stauffer, and Reuben Brower. Richard Ellmann, still in graduate school, was a gently derisive presence, and Robert Frost, who lived nearby, a paterfamilias. My softball pitching won his esteem and admission to the evening sessions at his house, where some of us would go after supper to listen to his ruminations. Slumped back in an easy chair, his old Vermont collie at his feet, Frost rambled on, his voice low and drowsy. There was nothing of the show-off in these soliloquies, as there often was in his public performances. What Elizabeth thought of him I don't remember asking, but she must have resented his snide digs at T. S. Eliot, whom she admired above all modern poets.

Although Elizabeth respected Newton Arvin's mind and work, she had small patience with his frequent requests for leaves of absence, with his physical and spiritual ills, with what she regarded as his pristine selfishness. She drily noted his readiness to dump his responsibilities on others and to let them clean up after his untidy breakdowns. "Like most of us aging and lonely people," she wrote me, "what he wants is to get away from *himself* & unfortunately you take yourself wherever you go. Moreover, I *can't* see Newt happy in his N.Y. literary crowd, with its drinking and gregariousness

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& personal squabbles etc. Of course what he hopes for is LOVE—but it has a way of not coming when you go out to seek it, & in any case with him will probably only lead to further heart-ache, I'm afraid. He is unlikely at his age & with his temperament to find someone with whom he can really make a life."

Comparing herself with the aging women she had seen in Tucson, Arizona, she was ready, she said, to "count my blessings, since most people there were slightly younger than I am but much more infirm. It struck me how it is really gracelessness of movement that is the chief sign of age. After about 60, even if not on crutches with arthritis, most women begin to be lumbering; they waddle or shuffle, or drag or heave themselves about, which is very unattractive. Men don't seem to suffer from it so much! And I'm glad to say that though my back plagues me incessantly, I am still quite light & limber."

When Katherine Anne Porter came to Smith in the early 1940s, at Newton Arvin's invitation, she touched off a mild commotion not only because she tried to cram her novella, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider,* into an afternoon's reading, but also because of the spell she cast on the male members of the English department at a post-lecture gathering that took place at my house. The guest of honor looked fetching in her white chiffon dress. The professors clustered around her like honeybees, leaving the local lionesses to pace the long living room unattended and, for a painful interlude, discomfited.

The setting of the story she raced through, chopped to pieces, and still couldn't finish was the United States during the influenza epidemic of 1918. Now, a quarter of a century later, World War II was under way, and the Smith College of President Neilson's era was defunct. He had interviewed me two years before Pearl Harbor in the old-fashioned president's office (his staff consisted of one secretary, grown old in her job); for an hour we argued, sometimes heatedly, about Newton Arvin's recent book on Walt Whitman, which Neilson (rightly) considered less able than Newton's earlier *Hawthorne.* He must have been one of the last college presidents to read the publications of his faculty. A few years after his retirement, Smith "went to war" in its own fashion, training women cadets for service in the United States Naval Reserve (WAVES) while retaining its traditional curricula.

Before America's entry into the war, with the Battle of Britain joined and Hitler's *Wehrmacht* smashing its way through France and the Low Countries, I had made this entry in my journal:

> *May 30, 1940.* A note to posterity. What it's like to be alive in the spring of 1940. I speak of a 28 year old man who is waiting for "something" to happen, getting ready for it. His feeling of fear, apprehension, resignation

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> mixed with joy, excitement, and anticipation. He's going toward that "something" expectantly, eyes open wide. The great slide is beginning, the momentum speeding up, brakes off. The radio is always on. One grows used to the announcement of catastrophes, not merely little inconsequential ones but big ones too. Whir of arms production. Bombs, bullets, tanks, planes pour off assembly lines. Warnings of invasion from hysterical South America, from Japan, of troops by the millions parachuting down from the swollen sky. We must build up the fleet, produce more and faster planes—above all, more planes. Make twelve hundred a day. Ford says he can. Knudsen doesn't doubt it. "Fifth Columnist," a term which may seem quaint in 500 years or less. Now it connotes treachery and violence; soon it will become a smear-word applied to anyone who holds unpopular opinions.
>
> Americans in 1940 go to ball games, dances, parties, movies, art galleries as I do. We don't lacerate ourselves because thousands of people abroad are being blown to bits. We don't hang a gigantic piece of crêpe over the country. No policy, no direction for the moment, a disregard for coming terror. Anyone will be lucky who thirty years from now can drink a glass of orange juice and smoke a cigarette—I mean anyone my age.

After Pearl Harbor, having failed the eye test for a Navy commission, I waited for the inevitable draft, twice postponed because of my age and marital status (over thirty, plus child). "Teaching haphazardly, waiting for the army to take me," reads a journal entry for December 2, 1942. "I want to join up and be overwhelmed with a little experience." While dangling, I worked for Polish farmers on the eastern side of the Connecticut River. Early in the century, they or their families had emigrated from the Pennsylvania coal districts and bought land from the dwindling Yankees. Now, short of manpower, they gladly hired untrained hands like me at twenty-five cents an hour to cut, bunch, and pack asparagus ("grass" they called it), to sucker and chop tobacco plants before precariously hanging them in suffocating barns, and to harvest potatoes, a hard, dirty operation.

Most of my co-workers were high-school kids. It took a lot of getting used to before they accepted the superannuated greenhorn (me) and stopped swiping his lunch. Their elders addressed them in Galician Polish—rather like Ukrainian, I was told—and they replied in an ugly bastard English, for they had junked the ancestral tongue without fully learning a new one. Only after a year's stay in Poland in the early 1960s did I get an inkling of Polish language and literature—but not for want of opportunity. The wife of the refugee scholar Manfred Kridl had urged me to study Polish with her, instead of learning Russian. My colleague Jane Zielonko, the smart and vivacious daughter of a Polish priest, also volunteered to give me lessons. It was she who brought her friend Czeslaw Milosz to our house one night shortly before he quit the Polish embassy and broke his Party

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chains. In the fall, Jane and I campaigned for Congressman (and later Massachusetts governor) Foster Furcolo—I at the wheel of a hired sound truck that played a rhyme I'd written to the tune of a Pepsi-Cola jingle, she broadcasting in Polish over the loudspeaker system to astonished farmers working in the tobacco fields.

Politics preoccupied a lot of people in Northampton and was serious business all the time I lived there. The old-stock local gentry occupying the best houses usually voted Republican, but so did small contingents of people with Polish and French-Canadian names. The Irish pretty well decided what was what in Democratic Party politics. The small community of Jews wasn't solidly with either party, but shaded toward the Democrats. The same was true of my fellow academics, though most of them didn't bother much about local and state politics or take time to weigh the qualifications of the candidates. They came to my wife and me for political dope, and because we thus inadvertently "controlled" a large bundle of votes in Northampton's silk-stocking district, the Democratic pols deemed us worthy of *recognition*. State and national candidates paid visits to our kitchen for tips on useful contacts during election times. Foster Furcolo came, and his campaign manager Larry O'Brien (soon to be JFK's trusted aide), and Adlai Stevenson, adored by the students of the Ivy League and the Seven Sisters. On election day, I checked lists of registered Democrats, telephoned the apathetic, hauled the faithful to and from the polls, and took on other kinds of bread-and-butter party work.

Among Northampton's notable Democrats was another "foreigner" (i.e., anyone who hadn't graduated from the local high school): the widow of the once eminent historian John Spencer Bassett. Her husband had been famously fired from Trinity College (soon to become Duke University) for his liberal views on the "Negro question," and was immediately invited to teach at Smith. Mrs. Bassett, a regal Virginia lady in her late seventies, wore her white hair like a turban and pronounced "card" as if it were spelled *kyard*. She lived in a Victorian Gothic house, behind which a well-tended lawn rolled down to the river. An old retainer cultivated her small vineyard and bottled her quite agreeable wine. Come election day, she would commandeer the polling booth in her ward and boss her dutiful helpers—the grandest Democrat in the city.

There were moments when my party co-workers—particularly the acolytes of Cardinal Spellman, Joseph McCarthy, and Father Curran—nauseated the Northampton Democrats of my wing. Moreover, we were fed up with interparty squabbles over "recognition" and with family feuds transported from Ireland years before and still festering. Hence I was strongly tempted to desert my greedy, benighted, and self-serving associates and to consider Republican alternatives—at least for local and state offices. I'd grown to like my neighbor, Judge Rufus Cook, a crusty anti-

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New Dealer who was nonetheless so stunned by FDR's death that he took to his bed for a day. I liked Grace Coolidge, the former president's serene and unaffected widow, who lived down the street. I valued the friendship of a public-spirited bank president who was also an ingrained conservative. But after casing the political meetings of the Northampton Republicans and watching them collectively at play, I felt irrevocably bound to the blowsy Democrats.

Political partisanship subsided in the city as the war against Hitler and Hirohito made all other issues pale. The remote, inscrutable, and outlandish Japanese made ideal enemies. Cartoonists transformed them into short, bowlegged, slant-eyed, bucktoothed monkeys, at once savage and ridiculous. Common knowledge had it that everything they made quickly fell to pieces. Mr. Niquette, the druggist who lived across the street, assured me that one American marine more than matched fifteen "Japs." The war in the Pacific soon expunged such folklore, but stories of Japanese cruelty, a good many of them authenticated, strengthened the popular belief that the Japanese were subhuman. Thus it happened that when Smith's depleted chemistry department recruited an American-born Japanese Californian, the college was harshly attacked and the man was abused in the streets. An anonymous phone-caller berated me for playing tennis with this treacherous "Nip."

Any public affronter of the town consensus courted censure. I found this out again in 1951, after criticizing Joe McCarthy before a joint meeting of the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs. One man whispered as he passed me, eyes straight ahead, that he was glad I'd spoken out; but no one in that stony-faced audience applauded. I was taken aback, but shouldn't have been. The club members were part of a national contingent that had given a hero's welcome to General Douglas MacArthur, just fired by President Truman for pushing his private war against China; they had driven their cars up and down Northampton's streets, headlights ablaze, horns honking.

By this time I had crossed the line dividing town and college by pitching for the Purseglove Pups, a softball team organized by the owner of a local bicycle shop, and by joining the Northampton Auxiliary Police. I carried a billy club and wore a helmet while keeping the streets safe during blackouts and hurricanes. Sergeant O'Donnell, a retired state police officer, conducted a series of training sessions in one of the city buildings. He showed us how to twist the arm of a reluctant prisoner when you're carting him off to jail, how to club him on the neck and shoulder, where it wouldn't show, and how to calm him down by stamping on his toes. "Everyone has a corn," the sergeant assured us, but we had no chance to apply his instructions or do much more than turn out on prescribed occasions. After we disbanded in 1946, my friends in the Northampton police advised me to quit the college, where prospects were dim, and to join the force.

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Doing so wouldn't have bumped Sergeant Regan's anti-porn juggernaut onto a quieter siding or kept Newton Arvin from his rendezvous in the Northampton courthouse. It was his bad luck that the scandal, which flared briefly but fatally in the tabloid press across the country and shook up American academia, didn't occur a decade later, when the case would have been thrown out of court—as eventually it was.

Newton died of pancreatic cancer in March 1963. I was in Poland and had been getting detailed bulletins on his condition from Alfred Young Fisher, a close friend and colleague. Over the years, both of us had usually been on hand to pitch in after one of Newton's periodic collapses. This time there was no recovery. "He is dwindling to thinness, dissolving slowly and whitely to the bone (as I see him)," wrote Fisher. "To me, he has on him the whiteness of shadows. Still, it is true that when he's not in pain he talks with humor and even a kind of surprising vigor. His eyes wander and, at times, look a little wild or startled, as if he had seen something." (I had observed the same look on the face of another colleague, the historian Dick Hofstadter, a week or so before he died—a wildness, an anger, as if he were on the wrong side of Acheron while his friends were still with the living.) Subsequent letters traced Newton's decline, and his serenity just before the end. "His body, as one might say, is diminished and nervous," Fisher wrote me, "but his brain smiles clearly."

Elizabeth Drew sent an untearful account of the funeral:

> Yes, poor Newt. It seems the end of something. The funeral service at St. John's was so dreary—I suppose if you believe in the Resurrection it sounds all right, but if not, such depressing nonsense. He must have *wanted* a service, though I think he had lapsed church attendance, hadn't he? Al Fisher looking so rosy & beaming, kissing everyone at the Church door: Mary Chase, with eagle eye, noting who was & who was not there.

Arvin did not arise phoenix-like from his own ashes. Still, he survived his exposure and humiliation more successfully than his young gay companions, who had no phalanx of eminent friends to shield them. He lived long enough to publish a fine book on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, but not long enough to shed the burden of his private and public guilt.

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Fat

SPENCER NADLER

I spend much of my life looking at cells through a microscope. Of all the cells I see, few are as distinctive as the human fat cell. Inside, a large fat globule steamrolls the rest of the cell's contents flat against the outer membrane until the sphere bulges like a mozzarella. Freeze and section this cell through its nucleus and you see a signet ring snugly fit upon a plump finger. When the cell is prepared for the scanning electron microscope, so much fat is lost in the processing that what remains is a three-dimensional shell, the cytoplasm and cell membrane stretched into a rim.

In all its endeavors, the fat cell, or adipocyte, is buttressed by an external network of collagen fibers; myriad capillaries, even occasional nerve twigs, course in between. Gregarious by nature, fat cells gather into millions of lobules, separated from one another yet held together like a vital mosaic by miles of inflexible fibrous tracts.

We are steeped in fat cells. They pervade the great panniculus beneath our skin; they collect around our adrenals and kidneys, in our abdomen and chest and bone marrow, in the grooves of our heart and the subtle spaces of our neck and armpits and groin. Fat cells are everywhere but our central nervous system, lungs, eyelids, ears, penis, and the backs of our hands. They insulate, buffer, and energize us.

Yet when I look through my microscope, my eye often glosses over them. Seeking treachery, I am trained to look for more likely cellular culprits. Unlike cancer cells, fat cells are so often part of the mix in a tissue biopsy that a pathologist can easily take them for granted. Their aggregate size, however, can affect our health; shape the way we think about ourselves and how others think of us; make our lives unbearable.

Spencer Nadler is a surgical pathologist. *The Language of Cells,* a collection of his medical essays, is forthcoming from Random House.

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Patti Fleming is five feet eight inches tall. She once weighed 356 pounds. She now weighs less than half that. Although her colossal subtraction yields no physical vestige of her former self, in her mind she remains a fat person.

Patti is reluctant to come to my hospital (any hospital) to talk with me, so I take the afternoon off to visit her at work. I am not averse to searching out patients' stories on their own turf, where they are often more forthcoming than on mine. Patti and I have been introduced by one of my colleagues, a bariatric nurse who knows of my interest in breaking through a pathologist's ingrained clinical myopia. I wish to think of cells as more than something fixed beneath the lens of my microscope.

We sit in a sterile conference room in the Los Angeles law firm where Patti, who is in her early forties, works as a legal secretary. She wears a short black pleated skirt and an ivory cashmere sweater; her face is pretty and her body trim. She says she can hardly believe she was ever so obese. Her maternal grandmother and her mother "carried weight in their stomachs," she tells me, but neither so extremely. "I was ten years old when I first noticed my weight," she says. "I couldn't get up on a horse as easily as the other girls." At camp, she ate the same portions of food as the others, and exercised every bit as much. Were "fat genes" beginning to express themselves?

"In high school, other kids first talked about me being fat, but I wouldn't let it happen. I'd miss meals and was very active in sports. I knew that if I ate, I'd get fat." She laughs. "I felt like if I smelled a cake, I'd gain five pounds."

Her adipocytes' penchant for hoarding fat was a secret. Away at work, her parents were unaware that she seldom ate breakfast or lunch. On the weekends, she was out of the house, skipping meals and trying to ignore her hunger. Her private starvation was a mind game, as impermanent as satiation.

The average-sized infant enters this world with approximately five billion fat cells, one-sixth to one-seventh of the adult quota. During the first six months of life, these cells significantly sufflate with fat, but their numbers remain relatively constant. From that point until the end of puberty, the process flip-flops: the number of fat cells increases to adult proportion, but their size does not change. Then, throughout adulthood, we return to the pattern of infancy, plumping up mostly by adding to the fat in our adipocytes. Some of us are capable of distending them by a factor of three or four to a gargantuan three-hundred-micron diameter. If our thirty-five billion adult fat cells enlarge in this way and trigger the formation of additional adipocytes, we can balloon to rotundity and come to resemble the cells themselves.

In human biopsies, normal fat is a glistening, uniform, cadmium yellow, its texture greasy and soft. In vivo, at body temperature, fat is liquid,

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oozing in and out of fat cells under neural and hormonal control. There is a perpetual ebb and flow of fat between its mobilized state in the blood (as free fatty acids) and its storage state in fat cells (most as triglycerides). The free fatty acids burn metabolically as a high-potency energy source; what is unused by the body gets restored as triglycerides in the fat cells. Such is the dynamism of fat, a flux complexly modified by how we eat and exercise, as well as by our genes.

When she was sixteen, Patti met Frank Fleming, her husband-to-be. He was unconcerned about her weight and encouraged her not to skip meals. "We enjoyed eating together," she says. "We ate the same amounts, but he stayed skinny and I got bigger and bigger."

They overate. Despite studies that suggest altered metabolism or disturbed satiety signals as predisposing factors, one must overeat to realize morbid obesity (which is defined as a weight of one hundred pounds or more above the norm). Whenever Frank gained a few pounds, he easily lost them by cutting out sweets for a week or two. Patti wasn't so fortunate. From the end of her teenage years until she was forty, she "pushed and shoved" her way through dozens of diets, spending thousands of dollars, losing and regaining hundreds of pounds. She tethered herself to diet food until she could no longer tolerate the tedium. The priceyness of those special packages angered her. Society did, too, for the stigma it placed on her body.

"I tried to exercise," she says, "but there are no commercial gyms that can hold people who are more than 250 pounds. You break their machines and they want you out of there." As her weight passed 300 pounds, she found exercise increasingly painful and finally impossible. Even walking down the street was a major effort. Her heart would pound; sweat would pour off her.

Her fat-cell aggregate was now so huge that she could barely keep her head above it. She seemed to be sinking inside herself, too mired to surface. Rather than garnering sympathy, she often repelled people; it was as if her globate habitus revealed all that was inside her, negating the need to look into her eyes or listen to a single word she spoke. It is hard for the morbidly obese to stand up for their rights when others consider their shape a character flaw rather than a disease or a disability. *Stop stuffing yourself,* people say, ignorant of the power of fat cells. *Do a little exercise once in a while. Don't be so damned lazy.*

Imagine fat as an organ tucked within our bodies, one that can rise to roll our features outward or shrink until it fades among the splay of protruding bones. To make sense of this "organ" when it is a lipid-laden albatross, we must hark back to our distant hunter-gatherer ancestors. No fatness there. The constant trekking over long distances in search of

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scarce foods probably selected against obesity. It has been theorized that these ancestors acquired "thrifty genes" to store the fat of feasts in order to sustain them through famines. In our American surfeit, these ancestral adaptations have become liabilities. Fine-tuned by our individual genetic legacies, each of us settles into a metabolic equilibrium.

For those of us whose genes are all too thrifty, this settling point is a level of excess weight that we cannot reduce without sustained dietary effort. Today, the increasing consumption of cheap, readily available fatty foods is propelling the most metabolically susceptible of us into exorbitant obesity. Once our fat cells become extremely impacted, the recidivism rate of diets is almost 100 percent. For four million morbidly obese Americans, diets strict enough to succeed are by and large too uncomfortable to be feasible. These people have an illness without a cure, one that is often complicated by heart disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, sleep apnea, gallstones, degenerative arthritis of weight-bearing joints, and restrictive lung disease.

Sometimes we have the opposite problem. Markedly reduced or absent fat is usually a marker of serious illness or catastrophe. Cancer can cause weight loss; many physical and psychological ailments can erode the appetite; famine or subjugation can bring starvation. Seriously underweight people appear hollowed out, as if their flesh has sunk beneath their skeletons. We feel contempt for the obese but pity for those who have no fat, along with anger if their loss was engendered by tyranny.

Starving fat cells can shrink to a fraction of their former selves. With centrally placed nuclei and globule-free pink cytoplasm, they come to resemble tumor cells. Golden brown lipofuscin pigment granules—footprints of wear and tear—lightly disperse themselves throughout. As part of this involution, fat lobules can deflate into discrete, fat-free balls or, in the severest cachexia, into worm-like streaks as they distance themselves from one another. This fat loss is most apparent beneath the skin and in fat that hovers inside the abdomen.

When starvation remains unabated and the body's fat stores are eventually spent, proteins are burned to fuel the last, flickering glow of life force. But proteins are essential for maintaining cell function. When they are depleted to half their normal level, death ensues.

I ask Patti to recall a typical day lived inside her atypical body. She tells me that she always felt uncomfortable when she awoke. She slept on her side because she couldn't breathe on her back; her arms and hands often got caught underneath her body, cutting off her circulation and waking her. By morning, her upper limbs were numb and swollen, and her back and neck were sore. Her side of the mattress was cratered when she arose. She covered the sinkhole with a blanket so that Frank couldn't see it.

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"I never ate breakfast," she says. "I got up, showered, and drove to work. The car seat creaked beneath me. I could hardly reach the steering wheel because my belly was in the way, and my feet went numb from body compression. Once I was rear-ended and my weight broke my seat in half."

Patti encountered little discrimination in her office, but lunches were difficult. She worried about fitting into a colleague's car en route to a restaurant. Once there, she prayed for a table and chairs because she couldn't wedge into a booth. Maître d's and waitresses ignored her. *Does anyone her size really want more food?* And sitting so close to others, she worried that the smell of her belly ooze would be detectable. Beneath her massive bulge of abdominal fat, ulcerated skin rashes wept until the itch was unbearable and the smell was rank. None of her medications brought relief. At home, she could raise the bulge of her abdomen and sit in the sway of a fan until the forced air dried her wounds, but at work there was no respite.

Patti also fretted about personal hygiene. "Morbidly obese people won't tell you this," she says, "but they can't wipe themselves properly after they use the bathroom. They can't reach their tush. At home I could clean my private parts with a hand shower. If I was sick, I had to rely on Frank to wipe me. He never said a word, but I was humiliated. At work, I kept a bottle washer with me. I'd wipe myself with it the best I could, but how uncomfortable was that?"

By the afternoon, Patti was emotionally and physically exhausted. Her legs swelled from supporting her body. Sciatica pierced her lower back like a fiery poker. She knew she would be too weary to cook dinner, so she usually bought fast food on the way home.

Some nights, parent meetings at the children's school could go on for hours. "The chairs in the auditorium were little plastic things. I'd stand but eventually they'd say, 'Sit.'" So she would cautiously spread herself over the chair, her legs and thighs bearing much of her load while she braced her arms against the armrests.

"What about sex?" I ask, emboldened by her candor.

Patti gazes at me patiently. No question is too personal; she wants to be as clear and open as she can in order to make people understand that morbid obesity is not a choice but an affliction. "I was pretty tired by then. Besides, it wasn't even enjoyable. I was confined to the missionary position and I couldn't stay there for long because I'd begin to choke."

Her lumbering lack of mobility in bed was just one more failure among her many. Beaten daily into feelings of inferiority, Patti lost hope that she could ever change. "You're hardly alive when you're so huge," she says quietly. "I'd think about my kids, how embarrassed they were for me, how I couldn't really be there for them. I'd have given anything to lose weight permanently, but I just couldn't do it."

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Surgeons fix bodily things. What is removable, if diseased or malfunctioning, they can remove, and what is irremovable, they can sometimes imaginatively bypass. (Witness the skirting of coronary-artery blockages with leg-vein grafts.) The disappointing long-term results of medical, drug, and behavioral therapies for obesity in extremis have increased the number of referrals for a different kind of bypass: bariatric surgery, which circumnavigates portions of the stomach.

In 1997, Patti Fleming learned from her physicians that perhaps, after all, she need not surrender all hope. Without bariatric surgery, she would not likely live to see her grandchildren; with it, she came to believe that she might prolong her future and even recapture her past, the years before her fat cells established an absolute dictatorship within her body.

The size and structure of the stomach pouch, the nature of the intestinal renovation, are intimately related and the subject of much surgical bandying. One such gastrointestinal resection—the Roux-en-Y gastric bypass—is currently the procedure of choice at UCLA; it is the one that Patti Fleming agreed to undergo. The bariatric team believed that she was a good candidate for the procedure, that she could commit herself to a draconian modification of her gastrointestinal tract and her life.

It is a courageous endeavor to submit one's obese body to the knife in this way, to pucker billions of fat cells in the hope of renewal. None of Patti's family or friends encouraged her to have the bypass. *Surely another diet is preferable to an operation.* She ignored them.

Patti awoke from the surgery frightened by what had been permanently perpetrated. Her 1,700-milliliter stomach had been miniaturized to 35 milliliters. The loss of 1,665 milliliters drastically reduced her stomach's capacity to process, absorb, and propel foods; her small intestines had been reconstructed to reduce the number of calories they could absorb. For the rest of her life, she would have to supplement her new diet with vitamin B_{12} injections. She would have to limit her food intake to frequent, small-portioned meals or suffer the consequences: the trim new stomach pouch, unable to handle at one sitting a food serving larger than a hard-boiled egg, or one that had been chewed fewer than thirty to forty times, would dump its unprocessed contents into the small bowel. The result would be abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, dizziness, heart palpitations, even loss of consciousness.

Patti's postoperative abdominal cramping was so severe that it made the deliveries of her children, without anesthetic, seem like child's play. Today, support groups are commonplace before and after bariatric surgery, but in 1997 they had not yet been organized, so Patti endured her flesh wounds as she had her obesity—largely on her own.

From minuscule drinks of water, she progressed to clear fluids and sugar-free Jell-O. By the third week, the cramping and wound pain had subsided and she could swallow liquid meals (Carnation Instant Break-

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fast, Slim-Fast). By the sixth week she was consuming high-protein, pureed foods along with a few soft foods (nonfat cottage cheese, water-packed canned tuna). By the eighth week she was eating fruits and vegetables. Pangs of withdrawal from fats and sweets seemed to rack every shriveling fat cell. She could not even drink a soda; the carbonated bubbles took up too much space.

Fat cells were releasing their stored triglycerides, and free fatty acids in the blood stream were burning like oil. Fat was melting into energy. Patti felt her clothes loosening. She still weighed more than 300 pounds, but Frank, who had opposed the surgery, noticed the shrinkage and cheered her on. For the first time in many years, she felt the urge to exercise. She swam in her apartment complex's outdoor pool at night, when the neighbors could not see her. As the pounds dropped, Patti's high blood pressure returned to normal and the arthritic pains in her feet, knees, back, and neck subsided. She was no longer primed for illness.

Six months after her surgery, Patti's jaw, elbows, shoulders, breasts, buttocks, knees, and even her lap emerged from her dwindling sphere. She could sit in a regular chair without bruising her hips; cross her legs; manipulate exercise equipment; climb in and out of a car with ease; fit into a restaurant booth.

"I lost so much weight in the early stages," she says, "that I didn't know what size I was. But it took my breath away when I first went to Victoria's Secret to buy underwear and to Robinsons-May for my clothes. I never went back to Lane Bryant again."

The lighter she got, the greater her incentive to retrieve all that she had missed. In her new 169-pound body—that is where she settled—Patti Fleming interacts casually with people and has rediscovered sports. She camps, water-skis, and kayaks, as she did in her youth. She often chooses tight-fitting dresses.

The Roux-en-Y is less a solution than a tool. It has allowed Patti to deplete her fat cells and to sustain this reduction as long as she plays by the rules, most of which prevent her from taking as much pleasure from eating as she used to. "If I get stressed and forget to eat slowly," she says, "the food gets stuck. It's like an elephant walking on my sternum. Frank will quickly spot fast eating and hold my hand. It's one of our secret little communications. He knows how hard I've worked to get where I am."

On the stage of my microscope, fat cells, whether too large or too small, aggregate in a lobular, geometric precision. Theirs is a glomerate beauty, an abundance or dearth of pure energy. In this microcosm I can see the power of their mutability. No other human cells can so rampantly rise or fall and, like millions of fiery suns burning bright or burning out, alter our universe.

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Something to Think About

GREGORY DJANIKIAN

Scientists have detected that the neutrino,
once thought to be massless, most likely has mass.
—Scientific American

It's the news of the day: neutrinos,
the ghostliest of particles,
are *something*, almost immeasurable,
though so many of them pulling together
might slow the expansion rate
of the universe.

It's similar to the parable
of the lion and the mouse,
how we shouldn't discount
even the smallest force.

And wouldn't I have been comforted
by this existential fact
the day Joe Barone
jammed me against the lockers
and said *You're a flea*?

Only Joe had never heard of neutrinos
and gave me the friction burns
on my scalp to prove it.

Which is why a liberal education
seems a fine idea, not only
for the smallest of us, but maybe for Joe, too,
who might one day find himself
needing a mortgage, say,
or standing in front of a hiring committee
of all his ex-tormented.

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It happens, of course, in the ideal
version of our lives.

And what would be Joe's version?
That he keeps getting bigger
and not needing revenge because
who would be stupid enough
to cross him?

Or how one day, someone he's got
by the collar mentions something
like muons or neutrinos
because there's nothing else he can say
and Joe drops his hands
to feel some small part of the world
pass through him,
making a difference.

It sounds like *my* ideal version of his life,
though I'd like to think that sometimes
the ideal undoes its gossamer robe, dives
into the muck of our lagoon,
changing it for a moment.

Like the time Joe put his paw
on my shoulder and said, *You're okay.*

Which, of course, never happened,
though many times he walked by
without hitting me, or saying a word.

Gregory Djanikian directs the creative writing program at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book of poetry is *Years Later*.

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A Matter of Definition

MICHAEL FALLON

Everywhere he went, the abyss followed:
A round black spot on the carpet,
A bridge that collapsed behind him with each step,
An open grave in exactly
His shape.

One day his head grew so ponderous,
Heavy with the hopeless gravity of things,
He toppled backwards, tumbling in the air and down
Through the specter of his own shadow,

Down through the solid earth,
The beds of ancient rivers,
The rifts
between continents,
To the planet's molten core.

A family of Tibetans was amazed
When he suddenly erupted from the ground during a funeral,
Flew headlong past them and away,
a dark speck diminishing
Over the snow-capped mountains.

Through the arcs of comets, layers
of galaxies unfolding, through
Bright storms of congealing gas,

When it occurred to him, weightless
As he was
In the weightless heart of things,
That gravity no longer applied to him,

Whether he fell or flew
Was simply a matter of definition,
And he sailed off in steep ascent

into the eye of eternity

Michael Fallon teaches at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He is the author of two books of poems, *A History of the Color Black* and, forthcoming, *Someone Has Pronounced Me*.

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The Oracular F. R. Leavis

MORRIS FREEDMAN

For more than forty years, Frank Raymond Leavis was an insistently hovering presence in the intellectual and academic life of Britain and America. Sternly and abrasively contemptuous of what he considered the easy adulation and routine puffery that passed for judgment in the teaching and promotion of literature, he preached that great fiction and poetry had to combine persuasive moral content with aesthetic mastery. He fervently believed that if writers of criticism and social commentary were to enlist literature as evidence, they had to base themselves on a cultivated grasp of literary merit.

I became aware of Leavis while pursuing a doctorate at Columbia University in the late 1940s. His reputation and authority had by then spread throughout the English-speaking world—in America, principally at Columbia, where graduate work in English and comparative literature had increasingly followed the Cambridge pattern. Marjorie Nicolson, who headed the department, used regularly to refer to Leavis's work and that of his Cambridge colleagues E. M. W. Tillyard, C. S. Lewis, and Basil Willey. She preferred their broader view of academic scholarship to the usually narrower American focus. Doctoral dissertations at other universities, for example, might be editions of obscure texts. Columbia's were likely to be elaborately documented essays, like Trilling's on Matthew Arnold, Mark Van Doren's on John Dryden, Emery Neff's on Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, Hiram Haydn's on "the counter renaissance," Kate Millett's on feminism.

I first took Leavis to be a Jew, partly because his name suggested that he

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was a "Levite"—that is, a descendant of the Old Testament's "Lewi"—and partly because his ponderous and adversarial exegetical manner struck me as rabbinical. More knowing fellow students disabused me. I did learn that his wife, Q. D. Leavis, a former student who became a distinguished critic in her own right, was Jewish. The "Q" stood for Queenie, English for the Hebrew *Malkeh* (more often rendered as *Regina*); before her marriage she had been *echt* Orthodox. Her husband was proud of his Huguenot descent (one of his more attractive vanities), and he could be sacrificially protective of Queenie. The issue of his ethnicity was not without relevance, especially during his ascendancy—a time when anti-Semitism was still endemic in the academic world. During one of his countless controversies, an opponent, who at the moment was losing no love for him and who knew otherwise, remarked that Leavis's problem was that he didn't know he was a Jew. (I'm not sure what that was supposed to mean, except that it seems at once both funny and nasty.) Leavis's disputatious style evoked for me the bristling polemics of John Milton and other seventeenth-century Puritan divines and intellectuals, which issued from a complex mix of aggressiveness and defensiveness.

The academic and publishing milieus were not the only ones to feel his presence keenly. The intellectual culture at large responded dramatically in the early 1960s, when Leavis countered C. P. Snow's famous lecture on "the two cultures." Snow, a prominent British scientist, bureaucrat, and novelist, had attacked the literary establishment for its ignorance of science and technology. Not to know the second law of thermodynamics, Snow contended, was comparable to not having "read a work of Shakespeare." Savaging Snow and science in general for their simpleminded indifference to anything but "jam for the masses," Leavis declared that Sir Charles was "utterly without a glimmer of what creative literature is, or why it matters." The lectures by Snow and Leavis, published in 1959 and 1963 respectively, led to a heated clash reminiscent of that in Swift's "Battle of the Books," and in other conflicts between "the ancients," who broadly favored classical traditions, and "the moderns," who endorsed emerging modes of thought. Vehement partisans filled the pages of intellectual and academic journals in Britain and America. The intemperateness of their writings prompted Lionel Trilling's magisterial pronouncement, in a summary essay in *Commentary*, that the ugliness had become "impermissible."

The reputation of F. R. Leavis, who died in 1978, rests on his teaching at Cambridge University, his books and essays, and his founding and editing of *Scrutiny* magazine. His *New Bearings in English Poetry*, published in 1932, helped accelerate the appreciation and study of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. His *Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, which appeared in 1948, gave substance not only to an increasingly reverential regard for Eliot, James, and Conrad but also to

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that accorded to Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and D. H. Lawrence. His recurrent emphases on the ranging import of literature may fairly be said to have contributed to the founding of respectable interdisciplinary studies in British and American universities.

Anyone's first impression of Leavis's work must be that he wrote a convoluted yet fastidious prose, in which masterful syntax gives evidence of delicate, intricate thought and uncompromising conviction. It is unmistakably the product of a mind not given to reticence or understatement, and not concerned about burdening the reader. Its tendentiousness often approaches the messianic. Leavis seems as untiringly engrossed in witnessing literary power as any proselytizer. One may sometimes—uncomfortably—hear in him a crusader converting an infidel. With time, that voice became piercingly clearer for me and lost its forbidding chill. Leavis is rarely ingratiating or elegant, but his immediate, persuasive sincerity is always decent and warm.

One thinks of him mainly as a pioneering advocate of mostly twentieth-century writing, whose worth universities lagged in recognizing. (His own doctoral dissertation, the first in the American mode that Cambridge granted, was on the connection between journalism and literature.) But anyone studying the great figures of earlier periods would inevitably come upon Leavis's suggestive commentary on Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, Bunyan, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley. He did not hesitate to disparage the patronizing declarations of senior Cambridge faculty, like E. M. W. Tillyard on Milton. *Scrutiny* consistently published articles, reviews, and correspondence that challenged conventional wisdoms across periods and genres. Leavis's contrarian, confrontational, often radical stances, in the material he accepted for *Scrutiny* and in his own writing, no doubt exacerbated his difficulties in getting the formal academic recognition he deserved.

As I read Leavis's texts, accommodating to his tone and idiom, I was caught up in his enthusiasms. For many years I retained, almost as an axiom, his intimation that literature in our century might most revealingly be defined as falling between the polarities of Eliot's reason and Lawrence's passion. Leavis seemed to me to be trying in effect to integrate the admirable but opposing imperatives of harnessed Hebraic thought and unbridled Hellenic delight, a distinction elaborated by Arnold. More recently, my appreciation of Leavis and his milieu was enhanced by Ian MacKillop's 1997 biography, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism.* Its evocative photographs showed the storefront of the Leavis family business (selling pianos) in Cambridge; Leavis striding in the garden of his home, books under his arm, shirt Byronically open, bald head uncovered; Queenie Dorothy Roth, in her first term at university but looking like a properly dressed and coiffed bat mitzvah girl in wire-rimmed glasses, sitting with stockinged legs dangling, hands folded in her lap. MacKillop's narrative offered absorbingly circumstantial accounts of the ferocious, too often foolish rivalries, jealousies, and altercations in which F. R. and Q. D. became

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mired; it also provided gentle vignettes of convivially crowded afternoon teas with students.

Q. D. is supposed to have remarked at a party that in the English civil war, F. R. "would have been one of Cromwell's generals." He heard her and immediately called across the room, "No, my dear, I would have been Cromwell." MacKillop believed Leavis would not have been happy in either persona. He contended that Leavis was intellectually resilient; that for all his caustic assertiveness and braggadocio, he was not an inflexible dogmatist, as Cromwellians normally are thought to be. The rueful irony about Leavis's overbearing presence is that he was too responsive to inventiveness to be tethered permanently to one pennant. Leavis, observed MacKillop, "was temperamentally uncomfortable with being sage-like. This was akin to his literary criticism with its principle of working by specificities, not rhetoric."

Leavis regularly revised and touched up his published evaluations, reflecting the expected shifts in affection and understanding that anyone experiences in a lifetime of devoted reading. One of his books, published in 1947, is pointedly entitled *Revaluation.* He was seldom uncertain or tentative about his published appraisals, original or amended, or about his general achievement. He had a firm and positive sense of his stature and resented being patronized. Slights and inaccurate assessments of his work incited him to crude anger. He was especially enraged when he thought that formulations he had arrived at after agonies of shaping had been used without attribution. He sensationally charged Edith Sitwell and a BBC commentator, on separate occasions, with plagiarizing him.

Like an immersed reader of Talmud, Leavis worried a text relentlessly, his endless adjustments in judgment and interpretation reflecting his respect for the author. He begins an essay on Johnson as the first of "three great critics" (the others are Coleridge and Arnold) with unqualified praise: "Johnson's critical writings are living literature. . . . They compel, and they repay, a real and disinterested reading, that full attention of the judging mind." Then he systematically scrapes away at specific failings. "It is when we come to his treatment of 'Lycidas' that we have something we can bluntly call disability," Leavis writes, going on to say that "Johnson has no use for 'music' apart from meaning . . . that is, has no leaning towards the taste, so decidedly alive in the eighteenth century, for Spenserian-Tennysonian melodizing, the incantatory play of mellifluousness in which sense is subordinated." Leavis shadows clearest praise with delicate qualification.

He starts a review of a collection of Eliot's essays on a warning note: "to many who are aware of a great indebtedness to Mr. Eliot every new prose book of his that comes out nowadays is something for a painfully apprehensive approach." Almost immediately, he fulfills his apprehension: "the new essay on Tennyson seems to me the worst essay in literary criticism that

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Mr. Eliot has yet published." He quotes a passage, then comments that "the flabbiness to which the air of brisk directness merely calls attention is pervasive." Leavis worried Eliot's positions on Milton with an exquisite straining for justice. He grants Eliot "the capacity to write criticism as influential as any in literary history"—largely because Eliot had worked out on his own the problems of making good poetry—but then takes him to task for not giving Milton enough credit for doing the same, and for not crediting Leavis himself for having already made an observation like one of Eliot's. When I sent Leavis an offprint of my essay "The Meaning of T. S. Eliot's Jew," which attempted to account for Eliot's negative references to Jews in terms of his seeking a secure place in a social tradition, he replied that the "edge" of his own sentiment toward Eliot remained sharper than mine. That edge cut more and more deeply as he honed the blade of his reading.

Leavis's defiance of expectation caused at least one of his students to lose patience with him. "Leavis will never learn," Marius Bewley exploded, "and there is something irritating about a person who won't. I think the people who have studied with him have some right to resent his intractability that has destroyed an influence that he, for the sake of these same people, ought to have safeguarded and enlarged. . . . The least he could have done would have been not to cultivate a position in the academic world that wouldn't have made an association with him a positive liability when it came time for those people to make their living."

Leavis's modulations, changes, and rejections of, say, his previous stands on Milton or Eliot demonstrate his tendency to seek new insights in appreciating and understanding any text. He did have moments of odd appetite, like his praise of William Empson's undistinguished poems or of Walter de la Mare's superior but still not consequential work. He was given to self-indulgent excess in his feuilletons, like the brusque but extended dismissal of a chorus in *Samson Agonistes*, worth a classroom digression but not the permanence of type.

Leavis labored to exhaustion what could seem like inessential differences. He admirably envisioned *Scrutiny* as a medium that would take literary criticism as seriously as journals like *Nature* and *Science* do their fields. He encouraged lengthy, intensively argued epistolary exchanges. Among his continuing concerns was the importance of drawing precise distinctions that separated literary criticism and scholarship from literary history and philosophy. But his contentiousness hardly encouraged extended, amicable, productive encounters even with critics he respected.

He almost could not accept that he might be esteemed by anyone who differed with him. His unquiet relations with Eliot were touchingly cited by Eliot himself. "I have always had considerable respect for Leavis and *Scrutiny*," he wrote in a letter to a student of Leavis's, "and have more than once gone out of my way to call upon him in Cambridge; but I know he feels I

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ought to have come actively to his defence in the *Criterion* days, and that somehow my support at that stage might have made all the difference." Leavis, for his part, early made irrevocable his positive estimate of Eliot's criticism by titling a 1952 collection *The Common Pursuit*, a phrase taken from Eliot's *The Function of Criticism:* "the critic, one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks . . . and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible in the common pursuit of true judgment." (A study of the Eliot-Leavis relationship would valuably serve literary scholarship.)

For all his fierce combativeness and almost heedless indifference to consequences, Leavis was hesitant about offending nonacademic authority. MacKillop's biography reported that the British Home Office once complained to the vice-chancellor at Cambridge that it was "disgusted at the prospect of 'boy and girl undergraduates' reading *Ulysses*," to which Leavis had referred in a lecture. Leavis responded that he would never think of requiring students to buy the book. His tigerlike growlings hid the proverbial pussycat.

Leavis was sensitive to his difficulties with colleagues. In an early letter thanking one of his teachers, he conceded "that in our personal intercourse I've always displayed a singularly unprepossessing gaucherie." MacKillop made unmistakable how ruinously Leavis could misapply his energies and talents in taking on offensive inferiors, gnats annoyingly buzzing about his elephantine hugeness. We can too readily see him as nearly paranoid in his repeated findings of malice in normal enough dealings that turned out not to favor him, although he clearly could not have misperceived the prevailing pettiness, shallowness, casual duplicity, and sheer, almost occupational stupidity of academic and publishing communities. Even when I could not quite understand the justice of this or that grievance, I was inclined to allow him every benefit of doubt. Nonetheless it was sad and wasteful for Leavis to have reacted so combatively to fools and knaves, let alone to those estimable and generously disposed persons who differed with him even mildly.

Leavis's brutal candor early began to make him an iconic celebrity in sophisticated British circles. Like Johnson, Shaw, and Beerbohm, he came to be admired for his capacity for pithy insult. University graduates in Britain, whether in literary studies or law, knew their Leavis. One such, Simon Gray, wrote *The Common Pursuit*, a play about life on a struggling literary magazine at Cambridge with resemblances to *Scrutiny*. I saw it in Hammersmith. It is a talky but ingratiating work, obviously intended to satisfy the largely fond awareness of Leavis among London audiences that patronize serious theater away from the West End.

With other great critics, Leavis shared a grave faith in the civilizing power of literature. That faith required dedicating all one's faculties to setting and rationalizing standards, then in applying and disseminating them

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effectively. Like Trilling the professor, Arnold the school inspector, and Johnson and Eliot the didactic pamphleteers, Leavis linked his identity as critical oracle with that as master teacher. In *Education and the University,* published in 1943, Leavis integrated his literary concerns, his long involvement with Eliot's poetry and criticism, and his experience as a teacher of advanced students to produce a remarkable volume ranging from insightful generalizations about Western education to imaginative suggestions for course content and examinations.

In rooting him in the British landscape, MacKillop scanted significant aspects of Leavis's American presence. He made only a passing and imprecise reference to a "youthful Trilling," one of Leavis's staunchest lifelong admirers and in good measure a Leavisite critic himself. Nor did he mention Leavis's relationship with Norman Podhoretz and *Commentary,* or his influence on American higher education beyond Columbia.

Leavis's teachings have spread widely and sunk deeply. Their effects may be observed in entertainment (in the surge in popularity of Austen and James); in new hotbeds of criticism (it is difficult to imagine that some could have flourished without Leavis's seeding); in the rise of a lambent cultural commentary that cuts across formal boundaries, like the writings of Trilling, Clement Greenberg, Jacques Barzun, Joseph Epstein, or Gore Vidal; and, of course, in higher education. His devotion to teaching, about which he wrote too little directly, underpinned and informed all of his writing. In assessing the character of humanities education today, or of education in professions dependent on literacy, or of the canons of value in any of the literary arts, it would be impossible to overstate the importance of F. R. Leavis. In the company of Johnson, Arnold, Eliot, and Trilling, he belongs on a Mount Rushmore of literary lawgivers.

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The Bishop's Theory Revisited

JEAN HOLLANDER

The redwood falling in
the Mendocino Wilderness
is not encumbered by
our hearing or not hearing it,
twigs swirling, cracking wood,
rocks plummeting and the trunk
crashing into red loam.

The camera clicks, splits
that violent pitching into
slits of frozen still-life.
A fingertip rescinds
the stem to upright, rears
the tree to needled tips,
and in slow motion shatters it.

Like a bad memory, art insists
the ax must crack the braided head
over and over, Raskolnikov kneel
at the crossroads and get up again,
and Hamlet rant, berate the queen,
ignorant of his quietus
from the uncurtained stage.

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Although we heard of Rabin's death
three days too late, was he
more dead, or less, because
we did not think of it?
The silent misery of fish,
scaled or not, the pig's screech
heard only by the slaughterer

those smells, blood, screams
saved over centuries,
with all the trees cracking
unheard—are noise, are sound
never lost by definition,
energy pulsing through space
in the infinity of uncreated worlds

rise, gather into flight
like cranes of Ibycus with cries
that give away his murderers:
the muffled music of the spheres
hums, trills and resonates
though trees fall
in a deaf forest.

Jean Hollander's translation of Dante's *Inferno* (with Robert Hollander) was recently published by Doubleday. She has published two collections of poetry, *Crushed into Honey* and *Moondog*, the latter of which was published in the *Quarterly Review of Literature* Poetry Book Series.

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Writing Letters for the Blind

GARY FINCKE

For fifteen cents, or twenty, in the script
I'd mastered from Miss Hartung, I wrote
Saturday letters for Bill Nelson, who
Sat blind with a white cane beside his chair.
He loved the letters in return, the lines
Scratched out in pencil or blue ballpoint ink.
This is Gary writing, he had me say,
And women, often, when they wrote, added
Postscripts that began *for your eyes only*
As if I wouldn't read their words aloud.
Such a dear, they repeated. *God bless you.*
We should all have such a generous son.
When one woman had her daughter write me,
She folded that page inside her letter
So Bill Nelson, holding the envelope,
Smiled and said, "It's a good one, two pages."
Straight out, that girl said her mother wanted
Us to meet, that the slope of my letters
And my way of crossing *t*s showed I was
A boy to be trusted when we were grown.

Before he paid me in nickels and dimes
From a change purse open on the table,
Bill Nelson measured every coin by touch.
A test, for sure, because everybody
Knew the blind heard better than the sighted,
And I passed for months, not stealing, until
A woman mailed a dollar postscripted
For me. It lay so quietly, so thin
On the table, I read, "The five dollars
Are for Gary," giving myself a raise.
Would Bill Nelson believe I was worth it?
Would he consider his coins and add them
Higher in my hand? In fact, I hoped so,
Because I wouldn't steal, taking nothing
From the blind but what I thought I deserved.

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We Are All Bohemians Now

PETER SCHWENDENER

Being a bohemian in America has always been a delicate matter. If bohemianism meant only keeping late hours, taking drugs, and drinking too much espresso, this would not be the case. In fact, it means claiming some form of privileged access to Art, Culture, and other uppercase abstractions that may be incapable of sounding spontaneous or heartfelt in an American accent.

And yet, during the sixties, America was the epicenter of bohemia. I grew up far from the East Village and Haight Ashbury, but my family was still brushed by the dark wing of the counterculture. In our Michigan suburb, the sixties had a very sharp profile, like an army getting ready to strike at some unspecified target. The target has yet to come into focus, at least for me, though my memory of the army is still clear and slightly painful because I was considered too young to join. Because of my age—I was ten years old in 1967—I was sidelined when it came to free love and demonstrations, but I did what I could.

By the time I secured a copy of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book from a bookstore in East Lansing, I was about twelve, and the sixties were already starting to seem more historical than real. I pressed on nonetheless, starting my own underground newspaper, organizing a sit-in outside the principal's office, and eventually getting kicked out of seventh grade. I was tutored at home, and though the principal said I could come back the following year, a psychologist in Ann Arbor persuaded my parents that a year at a Quaker school near Toronto might fix whatever was wrong

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with me. So without avoiding the draft, getting high, or even having fun, I participated enough in the sixties to end up, albeit against my will, in Canada.

Eventually I returned to an American high school, where, in what I believe was a continuation of the sixties by other means, I became a Jesus freak. My Jesus phase lasted four years, three of which were spent as a member of a group that started out peacefully enough but soon became a cult. By this time it was the early seventies, and mainstream churches, among them a large Catholic church in East Lansing, were swept up in the so-called charismatic movement, which emphasized speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit. This was the milieu I entered, and after a while I realized that it consisted largely of veterans of the sixties who had, without much psychic shifting of gears, exchanged drugs and sex for what they considered more durable ecstasies.

These people, like the hippies they had been or whose manners they emulated, believed strongly in spontaneity. They rented church basements or banquet halls at the Ramada Inn for their meetings, or convened in private houses or messy student apartments. Though they dimly adhered to all of the standard Christian beliefs, their emphasis was on the direct experience of the supernatural. Some members of the local charismatic movement had infiltrated the Episcopal church my parents attended, and I first spoke in tongues at their urging, only to find that I vastly preferred praying in English. As a Christian, I was attracted mostly to the intellectual aspects of the faith, and this got me off to a bad start with the Jesus People. I wanted to study the Bible and preach the gospel, but when I set up as an amateur evangelist, I was gently informed that love was more important than what people actually believed.

When I found a group that took religious belief seriously, or seemed to, I immediately became a member. The group called itself Shiloh Fellowship, and it wasn't long before the genial "fellowship" aspect receded behind the humorless claim that we had the truth and most of the other Christians around us did not. We had, in fact, most of the ingredients of Jonestown or the Branch Davidians: a craggily handsome pseudo-intellectual leader with a beautiful wife; a rigorously enforced system of tithing; proximity to a huge, intellectually flaccid college campus that constantly fed us new members; and, last but not least, an odd-sounding name. I spent three years as a member of the Fellowship, during two of which I lived in a communal household modeled after the Christian enclaves depicted in the Book of Acts. By the time I left, there were almost five hundred members, and enough money to start buying up property around East Lansing for more group households—one of the practices that, among others, made the temporal authorities suspicious.

Criminal practices were alleged; of these I fortunately know nothing. Our leader was at one point forcibly expelled from the cult, only to be

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melodramatically reinstated a few weeks later (he may have staged this himself). I recall rooms full of members shrieking and falling as our leader commanded evil spirits to leave their bodies. One prolonged group exorcism was held in the church basement, and as I listened to the screams of the supposed demoniacs, it occurred to me that life was too full of real, involuntary suffering for this kind of make-believe. I quietly walked out (no one even noticed) and went upstairs to the empty church choir, where I suddenly started crying. That was the moment I knew I had to leave the group. Shiloh Fellowship finally went down in 1983 (fortunately, in metaphorical rather than literal flames), spending months on the front page of the *Lansing State Journal* as former members pummeled it with million-dollar lawsuits. An ex-cultist recently told me that our leader, the erstwhile exorcist, is now a motivational speaker.

I was reminded of this depressing religious phase by a recent book called *Weird Like Us: My Bohemian America.* The author, Ann Powers, compares the secular communes of the sixties to "the Puritan settlement in New England," and though some might find this a bizarre linkage, I believe she is on to something. The late Cardinal O'Connor, in a 1994 television interview with Charlie Rose, called the Catholic Church "a counterculture." Bohemias and religions are alike in two ways: they thrive on exclusivity, on scorning the squares or the unsaved, and they entail what Powers calls a "critique" of one's biological origins ("If any man come to me," says Jesus less delicately, "and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.")

As a refugee from a cult, I made it to college, where I studied English literature, probably the most anti-bohemian body of writing in Western culture. There are patches of bohemianism in English literature—De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,* Gissing's *New Grub Street,* some of Dickens, Oscar Wilde, a few late Victorian poets—but programmatic hostility to bourgeois life does not give English literature its tone. American literature, on the other hand, though not exactly hostile to convention, is at least chronically nervous about it. There is nothing like Hawthorne in English literature, or like the scene in Hemingway's story "Soldier's Home" in which, asked by his mother if he loves her, the soldier says, appallingly, "No."

I did manage to live for a while in San Francisco, though not as a bohemian. I was a graduate student, and did most of my reading in cafés. The sixties were totally dead, though their relics, human and otherwise, were all around; it was a sixties wax museum. I lived in the Western Addition, not far from Haight Street. On Golden Gate Avenue, about a block from my apartment, a small plaque on a nondescript building informed tourists that Patty Hearst had been held hostage there by the

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Symbionese Liberation Army. Its tone was identical to that in which historical markers in small towns celebrate houses in which George Washington once spent a night.

Bohemia in America, despite its ties to New York City and San Francisco, is not geographically limited. It doesn't even depend totally on cities, and wherever it occurs it seems more serious, or more ideological, than bohemias elsewhere, more uneasily aware of the abyss all Americans, not just bohemians, call "selling out." Bohemians in other parts of the world can have fun, but here they are martyrs to an ideal of authenticity that is essentially a parody of bourgeois "success." To the bohemian who is more than an irresponsible hedonist (and that includes most American specimens of the genre), the surface of everyday life is irredeemably corrupt, and salvation consists in constantly veering away from it toward something that is judged more "real," even though it is maddeningly indistinct.

There are no golden ages, though there are times and places in which the urge to escape the surface is not very tempting. Both of my parents grew up in small towns that were complex and full, no doubt, of psychological misery, but the surface remained calm. My father didn't like his high school in Union City, Michigan, and asked his parents for permission to hitchhike to Ann Arbor, where, he had heard, the University of Michigan had recently opened a lab school for potential undergraduates. Amazingly, they let him go, and he wound up a U of M graduate. My mother, for different reasons but no less unusually, also went to college. By contrast, the only thing that made my road to college doubtful was the fact that by the age of eighteen I had become a religious fanatic. I still made it, and now everyone goes to college whether he wants to or not. Those who discuss bohemia in America today have a harder time than the author of *Babbitt* did because education carries as much weight as business, family, or any of the old status markers.

The runaway prestige of education has altered everyone's notion of a "counterculture." If factors outside the classroom used to determine what went on in the classroom, something like the opposite is now the case. Education has become an end in itself, and has shown its ability to reduce anything in its path to just another item on the syllabus. In *Bobos in Paradise*, David Brooks has explored, among other things, this emergence of education as the highest good of an information age. Bobos, he explains, are "bourgeois bohemians," and their celebrity representatives include "Henry Louis Gates, Charlie Rose, Steven Jobs, Doris Kearns Goodwin, David Geffen, Tina Brown, Maureen Dowd, Jerry Seinfeld, Stephen Jay Gould, Lou Reed, Tim Russert, Steve Case, Ken Burns, Al Gore, Bill Bradley, John McCain, George W. Bush." Factors that once would have caused these names to jostle or even negate each other (Lou Reed, John McCain) have been leveled by education, or rather by the

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desire to appear educated; the universality of the latter is more recent than most people are prepared to admit.

Those who call themselves conservatives love to ferret out instances of college courses on pornography, sadomasochism, or the semiotics of shopping. I am glad that I did not have to "study" these things in college, but the conservatives miss the point, which is that education, or pedagogy, has managed to remake so much of the culture in its own image. According to Brooks, it has also served, at least among the upper classes, to level distinctions between "the bohemian 1960s and the bourgeois 1980s." The sharply drawn line between bohemian and bourgeois does seem something of a historical artifact. Both words have lost their ability to provoke.

To establish that I am not one of Brooks's bourgeois bohemians, I can consult my checking account, whose balance not long ago, just after the rent check cleared, was twenty-eight cents. (I live this way by choice, however, so I'm not complaining.) But even though I own a bicycle instead of a car, use a typewriter instead of a computer, and drink beer instead of vintage wine, I'm not a poor bohemian either. The reason I can't claim legitimate membership is that I have failed to adopt a stance of unremitting hostility toward the surface of life. Something like that stance characterized the four years I spent as a fundamentalist, and more and more I see real bohemianism as essentially religious. The greatest bohemian, Arthur Rimbaud, was instrumental in converting Paul Claudel, among others, to Catholicism. Claudel told a friend that the supernatural had revealed itself to him through Rimbaud's verse. In America before the sixties, religious revivalism and crime were the only non-bohemian methods of rebelling against everyday life, assuming one felt it deserved rebellion.

In the aftermath of the sixties, bohemia no longer monopolizes the idea that life consists of two things, a wan, discolored "surface" and a vibrant reality below it that threatens constantly to reduce the surface to smithereens. This bifurcated image of daily life is now a common heritage, existing among Chomskyites, Buchananites, and aesthetes—nearly everyone except Christians in those parts of the South that are so solidly Southern Baptist as effectively to be theocracies. Not all religion is otherworldly, and not all bohemians regard everyday life as too inauthentic to care about, but the similarities still haunt me. Not far from where I grew up, beside a cornfield on one of the rural roads, there was a tiny, white building called the Burkley Road Gospel Hall. After being saved, I went there one Sunday, and there were hymns but no organ, because all musical instruments were vain things. Everything except a few articles of women's clothing was literally black or white. The surface of life had been rendered so featureless it was almost transparent, allowing the worshippers to stare through it at Reality.

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There may still be bohemians who take this approach to "reality" and everyday life, regarding the two as opposites. It's hard to tell, because bohemians are less articulate than they used to be. Bohemians of yore typically expressed their rejection of what Lionel Trilling called "the falsities of an alienated social reality" in novels, poems, and plays that were addressed largely to denizens of that degraded reality. Bohemia is no longer mainly verbal, perhaps because language, no matter how or in what spirit it is used, is inherently conservative. However twisted the syntax, or non-syntax, of the most uncompromising avant-garde poem, it still makes even fairly naïve readers think of "poetry," meaning (if only by default) Shakespeare, Robert Frost, and Mother Goose. Knowing this, today's serious bohemians steer clear of language as much as possible, preferring music instead.

This panicked flight from the word has made bohemia more politically predictable than it used to be. Its hospitality to right-wing geniuses (think of Baudelaire and many of the early modernists) has dried up completely. We have consequently forgotten that bohemians have not always been leftists, nor have they always been young. Bohemia used to be an all-ages show that tolerated stodgy activities—getting married, even having children. Since the sixties, however, bohemia, youth, and the Left have been forced together, probably to the impoverishment of all three. If Baudelaire, who believed in original sin but not in God, were alive today, he would not be allowed to write poetry; he'd have to be a neoconservative pundit, possibly even a cynical supporter of the religious Right, like some of David Brooks's more troubling colleagues.

Politics aside, two things seem to have happened to bohemia since the sixties. The first is a falling-out with serious writing or high culture, with which bohemia used to sustain an uneasy dialogue. Kerouac and Ginsberg were renegades from middle-class morality but not from middle-class reading habits. Both studied literature in college, and Ginsberg's affectionate references to his father, who wrote newspaper verse, always seemed unforced, as did William S. Burroughs's references to such harmless nineteenth-century poets as James Whitcomb Riley. The continuing popularity of *On the Road* has less to do with its subject matter, which is about as incendiary as Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees," than with the fact that it is deceptively well written. Like all Romantics, Kerouac claimed to write spontaneously, but *On the Road* pleasantly belies the claim. The Kerouac revival is pretty much a one-book affair because his other books, with the possible exception of *The Dharma Bums*, really were spontaneous. The Beats have a tiny, instructively ironic body of work that has survived: two or three poems by Ginsberg, the late Gregory Corso's "Marriage," Burroughs's *Junky*, and a handful of other writings whose common denominator is a striking lack of breathless spontaneity and a devotion to making sense, respecting the limits of metaphor, and other

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things that are now relegated to the dustbin of "high"—meaning adult—culture. The Beats were the last bohemians in America who were on speaking terms with culture in this now-precarious sense of the word. Ironically, they appear today as custodians of culture in this older sense by virtue of their very quarrel with it.

The other thing that has happened to American bohemia since the sixties (as David Brooks so entertainingly explains) is the blurring at the edges of what people mean by "counterculture." Bohemia has become moderate and undogmatic, more like the Episcopal Church than the Burkley Road Gospel Hall. Bohemians still break the law occasionally, and to appease bohemian fundamentalists, the author of *Weird Like Us* has a few good words to say for drugs and what she calls "debauchery." Unfortunately, Powers makes these sound like the countercultural equivalents of castor oil and jogging. No one goes to bohemia anymore for what Rimbaud—mysteriously quoted by Brooks, but not by the wilder Powers—called the deregulation of all the senses.

Bohemia in America, traditionally populated by white refugees from the wealthy or middle classes, is becoming harder and harder to discern. It's safe to say, as Powers and Brooks do in different ways, that on a purely literal level it has vanished. Of her quest for bohemia, the former writes, "I am now in the middle of a life spent exploring an elusive territory, a homeland hidden right in the middle of today's America." Bohemia is now everywhere and nowhere, or, as Brooks puts it in other terms, has evanesced to a form of upper-class décor. What we now call the sixties (it promotes the cause of sanity to remember that many people didn't call it that until the eighties) did not extend bohemia's hold over the country, but rather marked the end of bohemia as a truly oppositional force. The surface of everyday life needs opposition from something potentially anarchic or it starts to go slack, and it is now hard to identify "bohemia" as a supplier of this opposition.

The frequent scenes of group exorcism I witnessed during my religious phase were proleptic of slam dancing at punk rock concerts and, later, the vaguely Boschian, drug-fueled "raves" that Powers ambiguously celebrates. Bohemia still enjoys a shadowy half-life, and I am reluctant to condemn it in its contemporary incarnation because my direct knowledge of it is slight; but the images it assumes in her account are too pulsingly immediate, with no room, psychic or otherwise, for reflection, silence, reading, real poetry, or other pursuits whose sworn enemy has traditionally been the bourgeoisie.

Bohemians and fundamentalists are, basically, Platonists who divide reality into two parts, one glamorous and exciting and the other drably "alienated." I don't want to minimize the real differences between Allen Ginsberg and Jerry Falwell. Religion rests on belief, and bohemians have

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no equivalent of the Westminster Catechism or Nicene Creed (or do they?—the quasi-liturgical cadences of Ginsberg's "Howl" just came uneasily to mind). Because of what happened to me (and it didn't just happen, I also made it happen), I have a slightly reductive tendency to see everything in religious terms. I am not, however, the only one to see, flickering as a common denominator behind fundamentalists and bohemians, a contemptuous division of the world into "us" and "them," the saved and the hopeless, the "tourists" (Powers refers, how ironically I can't tell, to "that most grievous bohemian offense, letting the tourists in") and the hip.

Real bohemians, as opposed to snobs who ingest illegal substances, are either genuine artists or, perhaps more typically, people without very much money who, though not despising the surface of everyday life, recognize it as a surface, not an end in itself. What is clear is that something vaguely honorable still clings to the idea of being a bohemian or, better still, "a bit of a bohemian." This can be accounted for, in my opinion, only by a residue of validity, or integrity, that has survived the ravages of trivialization and vulgarity that bohemia has undergone since the sixties. There is something classically "modern," as opposed to postmodern, about the very idea of bohemia. Bohemia still reposes on the old-fashioned, not contemptible notion that within each person is something incorruptible. Bohemia still believes in an "inside." Postmodernism, which loves surfaces and hates psychology, has not eroded its attachment to this now almost quaint concept of internality.

If bohemia, even in its sadly diminished state, has become the sole custodian of this idea, then I am forced to conclude, as Richard Nixon did about Keynesians and as Nathan Glazer did more recently about multiculturalists, that We Are All Bohemians Now. Everyone I know, including my own parents, shows distinct signs of having embraced, consciously or otherwise, the once exclusively bohemian idea that meaning, values, and all of those other tricky things tend not to float lazily on the surface but are obtainable only by various forms of deep-sea diving. The surface of American life was churned up considerably during the sixties, and has slowly evened out. However, it still needs something undependably energetic, even anarchic, exerting pressure from below. Bohemia used to be a blatant, almost too easily exploitable source of this necessary unruliness. Now that it has extinguished the clove cigarettes, washed off the patchouli oil, and hung up all the berets, I, for one, hesitate to accuse it of having sold out.

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Desert

CATHARINE SAVAGE BROSMAN

It has been nearly fifty years since I lived year-round in that part of extreme West Texas which belongs to the Chihuahuan Desert; but my mind is connected to it still, as though magnetized by, or magnetizing, its strange mineral soils and the lodes of ore that run along the Rio Grande and through the Chisos Mountains. When I was fifteen, my parents moved to the Big Bend from Colorado. Did I appreciate the desert less when I was growing up in its light, surrounded by arid hills and pure skies? Perhaps. "The true paradise," said Proust, "is the paradise one has lost." That we human beings cannot fathom our present fully is a poetic, as well as a psychological, observation. Heraclitus and Zeno noted ages ago the paradox of living in an instantaneous present that cannot be arrested, gone as soon as it arrives, represented by an arrow that, although apparently immobile at any single moment, nevertheless flies. Shelley wrote, "We look before and after, / And pine for what is not; / Our sincerest laughter / with some pain is fraught."

If I now see the desert differently, conceivably better, from the remove of an adult lifetime spent elsewhere, this is for several reasons. First, my vision, as a girl preparing for the university, was chiefly prospective, not circumspective or retrospective. The young must engage their energies and attentions in a forward direction, toward their potential selves, especially if they are fortunate enough to be healthy and vigorous, as I was. Second, the passage of time is a magic lantern, a set of optical lenses affording a range of visions over years and territories and beings of the

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past—visions more precise, more subtly illuminated than before, embracing both a nearly microscopic view, which pauses to count each tiny purple blossom of desert verbena among the sage, and a cosmic view, in which all of Texas seems like a pinprick. Finally, my understanding of the desert has been heightened by contrast. I have lived for decades below sea level in New Orleans, where the average annual rainfall is sixty-two inches. Immense trees take up most of the sky here; greenery pushes through fences and overflows the gardens; giant roots lift and split the sidewalks; and for half the year one can barely breathe, or so it seems. Confinement implies windows from which to look out. To use Proust's image, Noah never saw the world better than from his ark.

According to the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, a desert is an "arid region, usually partly covered by sand, having scanty vegetation or sometimes almost none, and capable of supporting only a limited and specially adapted animal population." By "arid" is meant an annual rainfall of ten inches or less. Vast parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, as well as some of California and Colorado, meet that definition, though they have an abundant growth of mesquite, greasewood, creosote bush, yucca, and cacti. For that matter, some of the Great Plains belonged originally, or still belongs, to the category of middle-latitude desert. Major Stephen H. Long, an explorer of the High Plains west to the Rocky Mountains, observed in 1821 to John C. Calhoun, then President James Monroe's secretary of war: "We do not hesitate in giving the opinion that [the area] is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence. . . . The scarcity of wood and water, almost uniformly prevalent, will prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country." In 1859, Horace Greeley spoke similarly of the desolate landscape of western Kansas and Nebraska and eastern Colorado—"the acme of barrenness." The Grand Valley (that is, the valley of the Colorado River on the Western Slope)—now laden with orchards and vineyards, but once arid—illustrates how it is only by irrigation from wells or diverted river water that the desert, as the prophet Isaiah wrote, "shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose."

Acquaintances sometimes say, when they learn that I have recently driven through the Southwest, "What did you want to go out there for? There's nothing but desert." But if that desert is myself?

As a girl I was in touch with it by vision (cholla cactus, prickly pear, horizon rippling in waves of heat), sound (rustling of wind, chirping of cactus wrens), taste (dust in my mouth), feel (sand under my feet), smell (desiccation of summer, sweetness of blooming catclaw, scent of rain on dry earth). During my undergraduate and postgraduate years, mostly in muggy Houston, there were, in addition to visits home, long automobile

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treks across New Mexico, south to north, and into Colorado, then back south almost to the Rio Grande. These journeys provided a variety of desert landscapes: the desert mountains and high rangelands of south-central Colorado, the white sands of New Mexico, the alkali flats east of El Paso, the folded mountains of the Big Bend.

The lasting hold of the desert and its rugged hills is confirmed by my collection of old postcards of the Big Bend—postcards of the smaller dimension no longer sold, some of them purchased from an eccentric couple, Mr. and Mrs. Theophilus, in their shop on Texas Highway 118: Judge Roy Bean's cabin at Langtry on the Rio Grande; Boquillas, upriver; Santa Elena Canyon; Mexico as seen from the U.S. side; the Chisos Mountains, including the Window in Big Bend Park; Cathedral Mountain, Twin Peaks, and Paisano Peak in Brewster County; Mitre Peak and Indian Lodge in Jeff Davis County. I also have an extensive collection of postcards of the mind—mental images of sliding down the White Sands using trash can lids as sleds; of hiking near Cloudcroft, New Mexico; of young Girl Scouts, with me as leader, climbing Mitre Peak.

The objects around me recall other desert landscapes and cultures. On a window ledge beside me as I write stands a photograph of the Organ Mountains east of Las Cruces, New Mexico. A small Navajo weaving adorns my desk; another covers an adjacent chair. Two pieces of Native American pottery, one (I think) from Santa Clara Pueblo, dating from the 1940s, and a more recent one from Cedar Mesa in Utah, keep me company. As I write this, I wear Navajo earrings, a Zuni bracelet, and turquoise beads from Santo Domingo Pueblo.

I helped bury my father in West Texas in the late 1960s. In the years that followed, it was wrenching to revisit the desert where his eyes had once found relief from depression, and to experience all over again the irremediable loss of one whose mind had animated the place for me. I feared touching the strings of the desert's lyre; their note—that of the mournful wind whistling all alone, without reply, over the creosote bush and mesquite, over the ridges of glinting sand, over the random desolation of the stones—was an unbearable lament. Had it not been for my mother, it would have been, I thought, better not to go back at all. Then she, too, took her place in the arid earth. After that it seemed preferable to return, even at the price of suffering, if this was the only way to see what their eyes had last rested upon. Surely, the offering was due to those who had given me everything. So I drove and shed tears, trying not to be blinded by them along the highway. Later, without renouncing the debt, I found it possible to enjoy the desert even more fully, as an homage to my parents, and in so doing to reenact my past—as well, perhaps, as to rediscover something deep-set in the human species. To reacquire the desert landscape, not by purchase of land but by contemplation, has been the business of many years since.

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The sources and forms of any lifelong attraction are many. In the case of the desert, the light is paramount. It enables me, as Camus wrote, to "carry my lucidity to the end." It filled Marc Chagall with wonder when he visited the Near East in 1931. Georgia O'Keeffe and the other painters who settled in Taos or its environs valued its extraordinary effects. O'Keeffe's paintings of animal skulls depend on desert light to illuminate both life and death, to portray the misery and grandeur of existence in their proper proportions. Then there is the pull of space, to which, unless we suffer from agoraphobia, our gaze cannot help being attracted. What is the eye but a way of traveling beyond the body? A British friend who journeyed with me through the Southwest told me later, as she showed me the fine prospect over valleys and hills offered by her new house on the edge of Sheffield, that on that trip she had learned to value the restfulness of distant views. Emptiness calls forth its opposite, a sense of interior fullness that, unimpeded by ceilings and walls or natural obstacles, is free to expand.

Another appeal of the desert is spareness—*dénuement*—simplicity, economy, understatement. Spareness takes forms geographic, biological, moral, social, economic, liturgical, architectural, musical, literary, graphic. In religion, it is asceticism or at least simplicity, like that of the Shakers. In architecture, it can be a severe Romanesque chapel, marked by bare stones and a plain altar, or a Dutch Reformed church whose only adornment is light. In biology, it includes the desert's highly efficient animal forms, its miniature flowers, its larger plants with immense root systems and porous, water-saving fibers. In music, I think of Gregorian chants or the *Gymnopédies* of Erik Satie. In our lives, spareness is thrift; more broadly, it is connected to the impulse to flee industry and machinery. There is in me something of the Luddite—not because my livelihood is threatened by mechanization, as that of the weavers was threatened by the mechanical looms, but from general moral principle, which tells me that it is unsound for either an individual or a society to enter into servitude to its products. "One thinks one possesses," says Gide's Ménalque in *L'Immoraliste,* "and one is possessed."

Geographically, spareness often accompanies vastness: icy polar wastes, high peaks unrelieved by vegetation, endless desert sand. These spectacles have appealed to many, in part because of their very barrenness, even because of their aura of hostility and danger. We human beings appear to have sprung from earlier species nurtured by the plentiful waters and luxuriant greenery of equatorial Africa. We once needed natural bounty to feed us; we needed caves and forests to protect us from heavy rain and searing sunlight. Now, however, abundance can seem oppressive. Joan Didion speaks in *Play It as It Lays* of old people at a rundown spa between Death Valley and the Nevada line who believe in the "restorative power of desolation." Jean Pélégri, a French-Algerian writer,

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speaks in *Ma mère l'Algérie* of "the apparently empty space of the desert" as intended for "thirst and prayer." In Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs (The Counterfeiters),* Olivier tells Edouard that he can imagine committing suicide after experiencing such an abundance of happiness that it could not, and perhaps should not, conceivably be repeated.

The impulse of exceptional individuals has often been to flee the assurances of home and seek wider horizons or more rigorous, perhaps purer lives. The struggle to survive, which Darwin saw as species-related, can become the search for individual challenge. Think of Roald Admundsen and Richard Byrd, of G. H. L. Mallory and Sir Edmund Hillary. Ease and routine are rejected by the less exceptional, too: look at those around us who are changing jobs, changing wives, changing children, changing addresses at age forty or fifty. This is not new; witness Lafcadio Hearn in Japan, Robert Louis Stevenson in the far Pacific, Paul Gauguin in Tahiti. "To sea, to sea" or "To the desert, to the desert," cry those seeking to slough off the old man and find renewal, even—or especially—if it be through want.

Not that I am a true ascetic: no hair shirts, thank you, no cold gruel. But human excess bothers me, and has bothered countless others who, according to the ways of their times, sought to withdraw to monastic cell, hermit's cave, or tower (Montaigne's wonderful turret retreat, Vigny's "ivory tower"). Here is where two meanings of *desert* join—a wild region, on the one hand, and an abandoned, solitary, or deserted location on the other. According to Littré's French dictionary, the first meaning preceded the second, which arose by extension. The desert is an anti-society. It was in the geographic desert of North Africa that early Christian hermits found solitude, the topography supporting their isolation and holiness.

An oasis means nothing without a desert to surround it. Nowhere is rain more valued than where it is scarce; it is by deprivation that a coming storm, or the promise of rain in a dark cloud over a distant ridge, acquires its deepest significance. My own mental desert has watering holes, clumps of desert walnut and mesquite, shady groves of cottonwoods along the dry riverbeds, pines at the higher elevations, rain in the afternoon (and, to be sure, campgrounds and motels). During past moments of unhappiness, I confess that I have used the desert as a crutch. I have looked backward toward it when I needed compensation for a difficult present. But my desert imaginings were less dangerous than strong drink, drugs, suicide, and crime; and they did honor to certain ideas and beings dear to me.

All this is terribly Romantic, with its assumption, as Byron put it in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* that features of nature can be "a part / of me and of my soul, as I of them." Well, that's perfectly respectable, if one is to judge by the many literary and artistic products of the nineteenth

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and twentieth centuries that have been concerned with self-investigation, self-expression, self-projection—often, though not always, in connection with nature. Romanticism is older than that, anyhow, going back not just well before 1800 but further; Shakespeare and even Euripides have been called Romantic.

I look to culture to support my taste for nature. I want precedents, spiritual fellows. In Scripture and literature of the Christian era, one finds uses of the desert so varied, so ancient, so repeated, as to warrant classing it as a central motif in the human *imaginaire.* My concordance to the Bible lists forty-five instances of the word (noun or adjective) as translating four Hebrew words, notably (in transliteration) *midbar.* This is in addition to its function as the equivalent of the Greek *erēmia* and *erēmos.* Then there is the even more frequent *wilderness,* for which there are two and a half columns of listings in small print (I leave the task of counting them to eyes younger than mine). It translates a number of Hebrew words, including *midbar,* as well as *erēmia* and *erēmos,* the latter recurring in all four Gospels as the place of John the Baptist's holy cry. Then there is the Hebrew word *tsiyyim,* meaning "inhabitants of dry places," translated "wild beasts of the desert."

Why did the seventeenth-century King James Version translators choose now *desert* or *desert place,* now *wilderness* as the equivalent of these Hebrew and Greek words? The English terms, as given in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* are close and somewhat overlapping, though not identical. A desert is "an uninhabited and uncultivated tract of country; a wilderness; now *esp.* a desolate and barren region, waterless and treeless, with but scanty herbiage; *abstractly,* desert condition or desolation." A wilderness is a "wild or uncultivated land . . . region or tract of land; a waste or desolate region of any kind." One thing is certain: like Shakespeare (as in *Macbeth*'s "the multitudinous seas incarnadine / making the green one red"), the translators appear to have relished drawing on two linguistic sources. *Wilderness* has a fine Germanic ring to it, coming out of Middle English from Old English, and kin to Middle High German and Middle Dutch *wildernisse. Desert,* by way of Middle English from Old French and ecclesiastical Latin and, before that, Latin *desertus* (past participle of *deserere,* "to sever connection with, abandon"), adds the contrasting Romanic note and offers etymological authority to the meaning "uninhabited."

The frequency of the terms in Scripture is no surprise, since the biblical lands consisted in part of infertile areas and lay adjacent to others. To the scribes, the desert was close at hand as a concrete reminder of historical and spiritual trial: suffering, atonement, redemption. The arid lands joining Africa to the Near East through the Sinai Peninsula were the site of the Hebrew children's wanderings after they left Egypt. Prophets ("like the foxes of the deserts," according to Ezekiel 13:4) sought

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refuge in the wilderness or came out of it; the psalmist sang that he himself was like "an owl of the desert" (102:6); hermits and saints, including Anthony the Great and Jerome with his lion and his sacred texts, retired to its solitude; John the Baptist cried in his unmistakable voice from its depths; and, greatest of all, Christ repaired to its wastes as preparation for His ministry and passion. The term *wilderness* is sometimes applied also to the profane and secular existence of this life, as opposed to heaven and the future life; in this application, it cannot represent a retreat from the world but instead (as in Bunyan's "the wilderness of this world") *is* that world, with all its snares.

A yellowed copy of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (tenth edition) cites more than a dozen passages in which *desert* is used to mean "wild" or "wilderness." Two are from Scripture: Isaiah's references to "the desert of the sea" (21:1) and the desert rejoicing, quoted earlier. Another is from Plutarch, who speaks of "sandy deserts full of wild beasts." The earliest quotation from English literature, from *Othello,* refers to "deserts idle" seen in travels (I, 3); next, chronologically, is Milton's *Comus,* which speaks of "deserted wildernesses." The word *desert* was used previously by British writers, but not in phrases that have become quotable and familiar. There follow in *Bartlett's* phrases by Pope, Gray (from the "Elegy"), and Byron (four citations, including "Oh that the desert were my dwelling-place" from *Childe Harold*). One also finds quotations from Thomas Hood and Tennyson. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provides citations from Pope and Dryden, including the latter's "desart World." Then there are a few allusions to wilderness. I do wonder how early British readers pictured the desert of Exodus, the wilderness of St. John. Perhaps the moors and peat bogs assisted their imagination. Certainly they did not have *National Geographic* to furnish visual details. The question arises of whether they were better off in that respect: that is, is imagination enhanced or impeded by photographic evidence?

In French literature, the desert appears very early in hagiographic texts, such as the thirteenth-century poem by Rutebeuf on Sainte-Marie l'Egyptienne, who, according to legend, spent seventeen years in the wilds. There are, however, few oft-quoted uses of the word before the nineteenth century; France, covered with great forests in the Dark Ages, was later stripped of most of them, but, even when they were cleared, had no vast barren expanses. At the end of Molière's *Misanthrope,* Alceste declares that he will retire to the desert—that is, withdraw from society—rather than remain in the world, where, to survive, he must practice what he considers unacceptable compromise with the truth (white lies, bargaining, paying court). His announcement is not meant to evoke images of sand; only students learning French, not understanding that the word means simply "isolation," imagine Saharan dunes populated by a lone,

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misanthropic recluse. Much more striking (partly because of its four nasal vowels and alliteration of *d*), though without visual precision, is Racine's beautiful line "Dans l'orient désert, quel devint mon ennui" from *Bérénice* (Among the Eastern wilds, what ennui was mine). The affective burden of the line and the desert setting are beautifully matched (the speaker, Antiochus, suffers from unrequited love). Still, I am not certain just what Racine had in mind. Did he visualize limitless wilderness, dunes, a treeless horizon? Or simply a deserted spot—emptied at least of the one who, to Antiochus, is all?

After 1800, the desert—in both senses—becomes a favored motif and theme in French literature and painting, and remains so throughout the nineteenth century. This is owing to at least two or three factors. The first is the voyage to America of Chateaubriand, an aristocratic émigré during the Revolution, and two works that came out of the journey: *Atala* and *René*. These romances and their wild, primitive settings—including Louisiana and Niagara Falls—brought the American wilderness to France. That Chateaubriand had never seen most of what he described and that his details were hugely wrong (pink flamingos, caribou, drunken bears, and herds of wild buffalo along the banks of the Mississippi, in which islands of water lilies float and from which the Appalachian Mountains can be seen) made little difference, I suppose. The topos of the desert as a place for pure, innocent lives was supported, of course, by the topos of the noble savage, going back in French literature as far as Montaigne, but not at the literary forefront until the eighteenth century, and popularized chiefly by Rousseau. After Chateaubriand published *Atala,* Lamartine gave verse form to the Rousseauesque impulse to flee society and retreat into one's own desert—generally, for him, an isolated place in a setting of either serene, undisturbed countryside or wild natural features.

A second factor is the popularity of the Near East in French culture. Napoleon had begun the fashion with his expedition to Egypt. Later, the invasion of Algiers in the summer of 1830 and the subsequent seizure, gradual pacification, and colonization of the surrounding territory by the French offered to travelers extraordinary opportunities for stimulating the imagination. Throughout the nineteenth century, painters and writers—Eugène Delacroix, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Gustave Flaubert and his friend Maxime du Camp, Horace Vernet, Eugène Fromentin, Guy de Maupassant, and many others—became tourists in North Africa and parts of the Near East. (Flaubert believed that he had been born to live there.) The sandy or rocky deserts that they encountered were described in their letters home and later appeared in poems, paintings, and narratives. Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine,* which shows the fourth-century Christian hermit on his desert mountaintop in Egypt, is a product of this Orientalist impulse, as is *Thaïs,* by Anatole France, in which the heroine, converted by a proselytizing monk, re-

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nounces the flesh and goes into seclusion among the female hermits of the desert. Even Spain was annexed by the Romantics to the imaginary complex of the Near East, reinforcing the image of barren landscapes where the reflective European or native could be alone with his thoughts or God or Allah. Gautier's poem "In deserto" explicitly compares Spain's sands and rocky *sierra* with the desert where Moses struck the stone to bring forth water. At the end of the nineteenth century, such figures as Isabelle Eberhardt, "la Bonne Nomade," who, disguised as a man, lived among the Arabs and traveled widely in North Africa, and Father Charles Foucauld, who ministered to the Tuaregs and was called "the hermit of Tamanrasset," drew further attention to the Algerian desert.

This major artistic trend found new modes in the following century. In Algeria, a local literature appeared, continuing the strain of travel literature but this time in the voices of those, such as Louis Bertrand, who, though of European extraction, lived there and thus saw the desert and its inhabitants as aspects of the Self rather than as Other. (Ultimately, indigenous writers—Arab and Berber—themselves took up the task of evoking the North African desert.) Rarely has the desert been so beautifully presented in literature as in certain pages by Saint-Exupéry and Camus. In *Terre des hommes* (*Wind, Sand, and Stars*), the former speaks of the period when he and one or two other pilots worked in Spanish Morocco. "The desert for us? It was what was born in us. What we learned about ourselves." In one episode, he lands on a high plateau with sides too steep for scaling, where, he is convinced, no other human being has ever set foot. Then there is the moving account of his crash in the Libyan desert along with his mechanic Prévot, of their wanderings and sufferings and their rescue nearly five days later by Bedouins. In these pages, the desert serves as a test and touchstone of the fundamental human enterprise of survival. Camus similarly wrote about the desert that he knew: although he grew up in Algiers, he visited the south more than once and clearly assumed it personally as a kind of interior landscape, combining the opposites of poverty and riches, exile (a principal motif of his) and the kingdom. One need not be familiar with biblical parallels to understand his usages, but it helps. To the stories "L'Hôte" ("The Guest") and "La Femme adultère" ("The Adulterous Woman") anyone who appreciates the American desert can respond immediately: the vast prospects; the ferocious winds, alternately hot and cold; the dunes; the empty sky.

The sky and the ocean, we know, often stand for freedom and possibility—the human dimension of potentiality, which the imagination projects onto these natural features and which they may in fact instrumentalize. The story of Icarus shows that men dreamed of flying for millennia before it became possible; Samuel Johnson picked up this desire in *Rasselas;* aviation writers such as Saint-Exupéry and Jules Roy wove

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into their narratives the connection between flying and personal freedom. In the early masterpieces set on the Aegean, water supports a project (the Argonauts, the armada bound for Troy) or provides a test (Odysseus wandering over the waves). Those who fly small planes or practice hang gliding speak of the exhilarating sense of freedom afforded by moving through the air, as sailors feel freedom in the movement they control through the tiller or the ropes. (Larger vessels and jumbo jets may impart a similar sense to their captains and pilots, but I doubt it: everything is too mechanized, and the connection between human will and the response of the vessel is mediated by hundreds of tons of weight and thousands of wires. As for passengers, they may enjoy themselves, but the sense of conquering the elements is hardly the same on the *QE2* as on a small skiff gliding along in the wind.)

Mountains may also connote freedom, particularly the high mountains of the Romantics (as viewed by Childe Harold, for instance), which afford privacy, isolation, and expansion of spirit ("I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills"); but they often signify obstacle, even entrapment. Forests, jungles, and swamps are even less suggestive of freedom, though in fact those fleeing society, especially policing authorities, have often found shelter or eluded their pursuers there. Fairy tales are full of dark woods whose very mention chills the listener. As for gardens, their privacy—whether charged with religious overtones, as in the cloisters of monasteries and other houses of retreat; erotic connotations, as in *Le Roman de la Rose;* or simply horticultural delights—rarely signifies liberty. The walls or hedges suggest confinement, and one is alone there for only a while at best, with the eye of God or perhaps some spy or lecher looking through the shrubbery, or an ear listening behind a tree. (In the desert, you know who's at your back—likely, no one). This is not to detract from the principle of Lovelace's "To Althea, from Prison": mind does indeed conquer matter, and the human soul can, with only its own resources, find emancipation even within confinement.

Who would deny, upon seeing a photograph of figures on camelback outlined against a red sky, that desert, like sky, sea, and mountains, signifies not only trial but also the freedom to be oneself? In Camus's "La Femme adultère," the heroine, looking out from the rooftops in the desert city that she is visiting with her husband, sees in the starry abundance and limitless sands the image of a human potentiality and fulfillment of being that she has never before experienced. Even the nomads, glimpsed in the distance in their camps, seem to represent liberty, as she imagines that they go where they wish to go, sufficient unto themselves, following no marked route. (The very real difficulty of their lives does not invalidate her feeling.)

The wonderful thing about the desert is that visually and imaginatively it is so close to the other geographic correlatives of freedom. Unless there

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is a dust storm, the desert provides views of the sky unbroken by lines of trees or other interfering vegetation, not to mention warehouses and skyscrapers. In the daytime the desert sky is a pristine blue, since the air is not hazy with humidity or city dirt; at night it is so laden with stars that one thinks they can't all possibly hold on up there and must come plummeting down. The desert's vast horizons similarly remind us of the ocean; here indeed are waves, in the form of dunes. This is not merely my imagination. Shakespeare offers the description "Environed with a wilderness of sea," and Pope, the line "To roam the howling desart of the main."

True, I am not really sailing, or flying through the sky, as I gaze out over a desert landscape and the celestial dome above it like a royal baldachin, but the eye sails and flies. . . . Then, if I wish to look at mountains as an extension of this dream, I can scale, mentally, a distant ridge and a farther chain of arid peaks, or—if I am in the extreme northwest corner of New Mexico—Shiprock, the great basaltic monument that, before the Spanish came, the native Americans, knowing nothing of sailing vessels, called the Rock with Wings. The Arabs and other inhabitants of the deserts of Africa and the Near East used "ships of the desert": dromedaries or camels. I can travel over and around these nearly marine vistas and climb the mountains (some of them, at least) in my Jeep, whose powerful engine and big tires might have been envied by Mercury the messenger.

What moments my own ship of the desert has let me collect! I think of camping with my Colorado cousins at Bottomless Lakes, Navajo Lake, and Chaco Canyon, all in New Mexico; Lake Ganado, Canyon de Chelly, and Monument Valley in Arizona; the Canyonlands area of Utah. I relive the splendid two-week camping trip I took in 1998 through New Mexico and the deserts of the other Four Corners states with my British friend, mentioned earlier, and her husband, who had traded the gorse and bracken of the Yorkshire moors for Mormon tea and juniper. In particular, the feel comes back of our first night, beneath the shade of a fine pecan tree watered from wells, with our tents well stabilized against the hot desert wind, wine in our cups and chili simmering on the fire. From those days and nights in the desert and its adjoining mountains, luminous moments still shine in my memory in pure Western colors: white from the heat of noontide sun and dazzling gypsum dunes; gold and amber from endless sands and long rays of sun; turquoise and deep lapis lazuli from the sky; dusty blue-green from the sage; dark green from distant forests; black from obsidian and basalt and the nighttime desert sky, whose piercing stars only deepen the darkness. And just now I have returned from a long sentimental journey, like all such travels a bit Proustian, over much of the same territory, seen this time in the light of autumn rather than high summer, with dust storms, heavy rains, hail,

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and, in the higher elevations, snow covering the stones and arroyos, making the rough places plain.

During this journey, I visited my cousin Edith in western Colorado. She asked me why, now that I am no longer engaged by Tulane University, I don't simply leave the soggy climes of New Orleans for southwestern Colorado, where I could live among sagebrush and piñon pine, and drive in a day or less to sites and landscapes I love: the mesquite-and-cactus rangelands of central New Mexico, the Great Sand Dunes, Monument Valley, Canyonlands, Taos, the Anasazi sites of Hovenweep. The reader may wonder also. While there are practical reasons (ties, duties, the proximity of a scholarly library where I know how to find things and use the collections I've helped build), perhaps the most important reason is the least tangible. It is better, I think, to leave unrealized at least one founding dream, to miss and yearn for something—not the impossible, however, but the possible, the real, where the heart takes up its abode while the rest of the body fulfills its necessary commitments in a world of work. Mesas shine most brilliantly from afar. In my mind, they glow now, at first dawn shadowed red and shaped fantastically like the figments of night, then taking on precision of outline, becoming dark green tablelands under turquoise skies; whitened later by the blanching sun of noontide; and finally, at sunset, deeply colored with the riches of the day—crimson, burnished gold, low purple, burning across the sky, then shading into darkness, *largo, largo, pianissimo,* falling into sleep.

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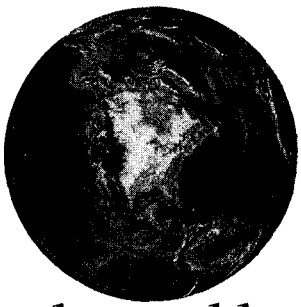

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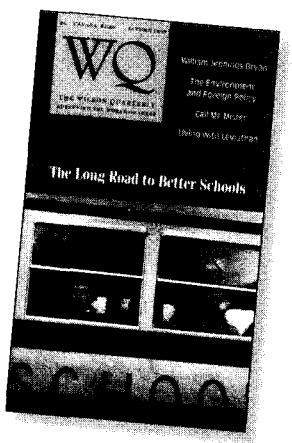

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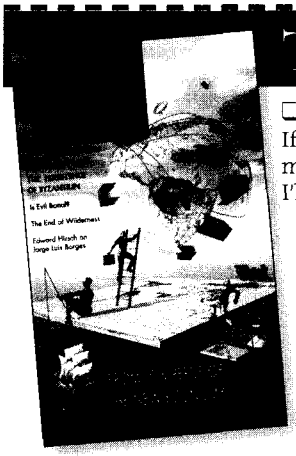

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Grave Robbing

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Her body stolen by fiendish men,
Her bones anatomized,
Her soul, we trust, has risen to God,
Where few physicians rise.

—Inscription on a tombstone in Hoosick, New York

The body in question belonged to a nine-year-old girl named Ruth Sprague. It had been stolen from its grave by a certain Roderick Clow on the night after she was buried in 1846, and then brought to the office of a local physician, Dr. P. M. Armstrong, where it was secretly dissected—anatomized—in the name of medical science. Along with the quatrain, the despised names of Clow and Armstrong were engraved on the tombstone for posterity to read, that their shameful deed might not be forgotten. Also engraved there is the remarkable statement that "her mutilated remains were obtained and deposited here."

Recovery of whatever was left of a clandestinely disinterred and anatomized corpse was a rarity, and there is no way of knowing just how the residuum of Ruth came to be buried in that place. Nor does there appear to be any evidence that either Clow or Armstrong was punished in any way for the theft or the dissection. They very likely went free, because only in the previous decade had anatomy laws been written to criminalize such desecrations, and even then their main objective was not to punish but to provide a steady supply of teaching material to medical schools. These statutes made available the bodies of the executed and the unknown, as well as those of people for whom no burial provisions had been made (certain paupers, for example), but the punitive measures against illegal disinterment went generally unenforced.

When Clow set out on his grisly mission that night, he was, whether knowingly or not, engaging in a line of work in which others had achieved a degree of dubious fame and even a kind of immortality. Not a few of his predecessors' exploits appear like unsightly blots on the pages of medical history, staining the images of some of the greatest anatomists and surgeons of all time. Many prominent teachers of surgery not only sponsored these unsavory doings but led expeditions of corporeal salvage themselves. Robert Liston of University College, London, who did the first European operation using ether in the very year of Ruth Sprague's postmortem dismemberment, was known to plunder cemeteries in the company of a notorious grave robber named Crouch. In one twice-told tale of Liston's adventures, he and Crouch argued over the rights to a grave site with a young surgeon in training, Mowbray Thomson, who finally carried the field by pulling out a pistol and threatening to kill the powerfully built surgeon. Liston and his henchman wisely retreated, thus avoiding the possibility of joining the disputed corpse as supine subjects of Thomson's scientific curiosity.

Human dissection was rare before the middle of the sixteenth century because medical theory was based on the concept of the imbalance of the four internal fluids, or humors; a detailed knowledge of anatomy was deemed unnecessary. The few textbook illustrations of organs were symbolic rather than accurate. Once or twice a year, medical schools provided a hurried public dissection of a cadaver—usually done by teachers who knew little more than their students—but only to provide a general idea of what the inside of a patient looked like. Things gradually began to change after 1543, the year of Andreas Vesalius's publication of his magnum opus, *De*

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humani corporis fabrica, the first textbook based on the dissection of human bodies. Vesalius's ability to obtain cadavers was enhanced by a bull that had been issued by Pope Sixtus in 1482, revoking the church's centuries-old prohibitions against human dissection, and allowing local bishops to provide assent—and usually to provide the bodies, too. The corpses of criminals, of the unknown or unclaimed dead, and of those who died intestate were by this means made available to physicians and artists. Without the Papal bull, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo would never have learned so much about the form and function of the major muscles. No such provision existed in Protestant countries.

By the end of the eighteenth century, medical theory had advanced sufficiently so that proper instruction of aspiring doctors was impossible without a reliable and plentiful source of cadavers. In England and Scotland, this presented a problem for the new breed of hospital-based clinicians and pathologists whose research demanded more corpses than the few made available by executions. Not only that, independent schools for anatomy instruction were beginning to crop up in Edinburgh and London. Because they competed for students, and won them by providing their dissecting tables with an uninterrupted flow of dead citizens, their need for bodies seemed endless. Medical professors in America, although they lagged far behind their European colleagues in both science and instruction, were having similar difficulties obtaining cadavers.

Wherever there is an expanding need for some new product, entrepreneurs of one kind or another are likely to appear, eager to fill it. The ever-growing demand for newly dead and still-intact human flesh was no exception. By the end of the eighteenth century, an entirely new profession had sprung up in the sceptered isle, and practitioners were also beginning to appear in the New World. They were variously called grave robbers, resurrectionists (for their skills at raising the dead), and sack-'em-up men (for their habit of depositing the unearthed bodies in large cloth bags for delivery to the customers).

Their methods soon took on a degree of standardization. As is true in all businesses, when ambitious young people working for a firm leave it to go out on their own, they continue to use the techniques their mentors have taught them. As it was necessary to work quickly and leave as little evidence of disturbance as possible, a particularly expeditious sequence of steps evolved. A hole would be dug over only the part of the coffin lid that covered the prospective specimen's head and shoulders; all of the removed sod would be deposited on a canvas to prevent it from marring the adjacent grass. The digging was done with specially prepared daggers of sharpened wood to avoid the clang that rings out when metal strikes stones. When the lid was reached, two broad hooks of iron were attached to its upper portion; sacking was packed over it to deaden the sound of breaking wood; and a quick, forcible jerk upward cracked it open. Having removed the short segment of broken lid, the body thieves would drag the corpse out head first, remove its burial clothes, and return them to the coffin. After carefully replacing the sod, they would then sack up the body, and at some point in the night deliver it to the open-pursed assistant of one or another generous prince of medicine.

As might be supposed, the sort of men attracted to this kind of work were not admirable. In the words of Henry Lonsdale, a contemporary Scottish teacher of anatomy: "Nothing was too base for them to do. Their countenances betrayed a sinister expression, and their dress, always shabby, neither resembled the artisan nor the lowest tradesman; they were non-descripts in person, as they were in character." But, thanks to the medical men, they were non-descripts with plenty of money in their pockets. In 1828, the police estimated that two hundred of them were plying their lucrative trade in London; ten made it their sole occupation.

As the practices became better known and more reliable, the surgeon customers increasingly separated themselves from the dirty work, using students or assistants as intermediaries with the nefarious tradesmen. This less direct form of complicity not only eased their pangs of conscience but also made them less vulnerable to retribution. The few prominent surgeons of the time had vast incomes and were willing to pay handsomely (Sir Astley Cooper, London's most prominent surgeon

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from about 1810 to perhaps 1830, is reliably said to have earned £100,000 in 1816, when a pound was worth five dollars and a seven-course meal could be had for less than ten shillings). In all, it was a tidy arrangement, fulfilling the needs of both purchaser and procurer.

But it was difficult and dangerous work. Cemeteries were patrolled by armed watchmen; families kept guard at the graves of the newly buried or hired toughs to do it for them. Many resurrectionists were badly beaten, and a few were killed. Some of the more enterprising members of the profession invented schemes that kept them out of harm's way or that helped them circumvent the cage-like steel housing, called a mortsafe, that some wealthy families took to putting over a grave immediately after the funeral.

The most common way to avoid working the graveyard shift, as it were, was to be constantly on the alert for people, especially among the poor, who were dying without friends to claim their bodies. No sooner had the final breath been taken than the sack-'em-up man would appear at the house or hospital with a lachrymose look on his face, and declare between racking sobs that he was a bereaved relative. Having claimed the body, he would take it on a horse-drawn cart or some similar conveyance to the usual destination, to be used for the usual purpose.

Such stratagems required more thespian skill, though, than all but a very few of these men possessed. As families became more watchful and the competition for good specimens accordingly increased, a few of the more daring resurrectionists devised schemes that might be said to have anticipated by a century the basis upon which Henry Ford's River Rouge plant was conceived: to control the entire process of manufacture, from raw materials to delivery. What this meant was the conversion of a perfectly healthy man or woman into a flawless cadaver made ready for immediate use—in a word, murder.

The lure of earning as much as thirty pounds per bag without risking life or limb had proved too tempting for several of the more barbarous resurrectionists. Surgeons and teachers of anatomy, desperate for specimens (and none too scrupulous themselves), turned a blind eye when they began to notice that an occasional corpse bore no evidence of any pathological condition that might cause death. But more principled observers were horrified by the turn of events. The *Lancet,* which had long been crusading for proper laws to regulate anatomy instruction and the procurement of bodies, made the situation public in an editorial of January 3, 1820: "We have ourselves, within a recent period, seen bodies brought into the dissecting room in this metropolis, exhibiting none of the appearances usually found on the bodies of persons who had died from disease, but with all the indications presented by the bodies of men who had died within a few hours, and in a state of perfect health."

In spite of such revelations, the anatomy murders continued, and even became more frequent. The most notorious of the perpetrators were two Irishmen named William Burke and William Hare, who contrived to kill at least sixteen of the citizens of Edinburgh in a twelve-month period ending on Halloween night of 1828, all in the name of medical science and free enterprise. Although not previously noted for particularly fine intellectual gifts, these two louts designed an ingenious method of corpse production. Their modus operandi was to ply a subject—usually a lonely, frail, elderly woman—with gin until she passed out, whereupon the ferretlike Hare would stop up her mouth and nose with his bony fingers while the hydrant-shaped Burke sat on her chest. This form of suffocation left no suspicious marks, was virtually foolproof, and entailed no physical risk to the two creative industrialists. The practice has, in fact, been memorialized in the form of a transitive verb in the name of its more active participant, defined in the *OED* as follows: *burke: kill (a person) to sell the body for dissection; suffocate or strangle secretly.* It is said that the hallmark of lasting fame is to be remembered as the eponym for an uncapitalized word (*watt* or *boycott,* for example). If so, the name of William Burke is destined to endure.

Burke and Hare found an eager customer in the person of Dr. Robert Knox, the proprietor of a private anatomy school patronized by medical students at the University of Edin-

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burgh. With such a steady patron, the two adventurers were rollicking in the success of their commercial venture, when it was all at once halted by the discovery of the body of an old woman, Margaret Docherty, hidden under a pile of straw in the seedy rooming house where they lived with their two slatternly mistresses. Hare turned King's evidence against Burke, who was hanged in a riotous ceremony witnessed by more than twenty thousand jubilant onlookers as though it were carnival day (which, in the literal sense, it was, considering the origin of that word from the Latin *carne vale,* flesh farewell, of Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras). By order of the court, Burke's corpse was then turned over to Alexander Monro, professor of anatomy at the University of Edinburgh, to be publicly dissected. Over the next two days, some forty thousand people filed past Dr. Monro's laboratory table to assure themselves that the executed fiend was getting his just deserts. What many must have known was that Monro himself was a regular sack-'em-up patron.

The exposure of Burke and Hare's villainy called public attention to the existence of anatomy murder far more effectively than had the restrained editorial in the *Lancet.* Yet no laws were enacted until the citizenry was aroused by another violent crime. On November 5, 1831, three thuggish men tried to sell the body of a fourteen-year-old Italian immigrant boy to the dissecting-room porter of King's College Hospital in London. The porter, more principled than most, thought the corpse bore signs of violence. He reported this to one of the anatomy instructors, who did an autopsy and confirmed that the boy's neck had been broken. The trial at the Old Bailey resulted in the conviction of all three murderers, two of whom were subsequently hanged and dissected, while the third was sentenced to transportation to Australia.

All hell now broke loose. There were public demands for reform; even some of the resurrectionists' best customers suddenly discovered a devout righteousness they had never before recognized in themselves. No less a surgical personage than Sir Astley himself appeared before a parliamentary hearing and declared in the ringing tones (his voice has been described in the reminiscences of admiring students as "silvery") that he usually reserved for the lecture hall at Guy's Hospital Medical School: "There is no person, let his situation in life be what it may, whom, if I were disposed to dissect, I could not obtain!" This bold admission—and statements like it uttered by others in Cooper's situation—struck terror into the hearts of its listeners, and they responded in August 1832 by passing the law that became known as the Anatomy Act. This piece of legislation provided for the appointment of medical inspectors to supervise every phase of anatomy teaching and the procurement of bodies, which were not to be delivered to a school unless one of these officials was present. While it did not provide for a steady source of cadavers, the law radically changed the atmosphere in which they were obtained. Also, it paved the way for later enactments allowing for the actual willing of bodies for dissection and their voluntary assignment by family members, thereby removing much of the public perception that there was something degrading about being anatomized.

But as long as provision for instructional cadavers remained imperfect, grave robbing would continue, albeit less frequently. Many are the tales of sordid adventure in which the spiritual descendants of the resurrectionists figure as the main characters, in both Great Britain and the United States. The unearthing of Ruth Sprague was a case in point. Decades would pass before a steady supply of honestly obtained specimens became generally available. In this twenty-first century, when anatomy is often taught with the aid of computerized representations and surgeons can learn their craft in virtual reality, it is hard to believe that barely a century and a half ago, doctors and medical students consorted so freely with criminals in the pursuit of learning.

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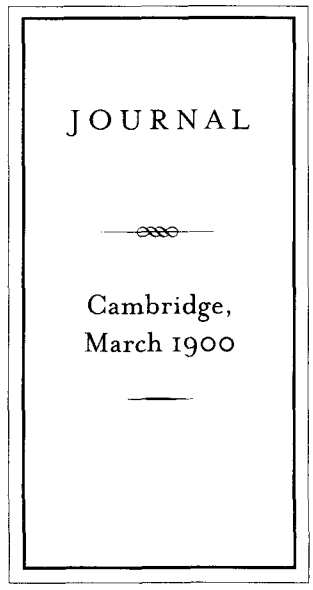

In the spring of 1900, members of the Harvard University community tried their hands at an exercise in collective journal-keeping. Proposed as a faculty project by Professor William Morris Davis, a geologist, the initiative grew to include students and staff members. The participants' journals of their activities in the month of March were placed in the University Archives and sealed for sixty years in a "Chest of 1900." These samplings are taken from excerpts selected and transcribed, with original spelling and punctuation intact, by archiving cataloger Lewis B. Day.

WILLIAM COOLIDGE LANE, *University Librarian, in charge of the journal-keeping project.*

March 1. This centennial year (whether it opens or closes a century, it can at least be called centennial) naturally directs one's thoughts to the past and the future, and there is no question that we should highly value such a series of records as Davis proposes if it had come down from the year 1700 or 1800. . . . It is interesting to see how it is taken by different men. Some pooh-pooh it as nonsense, others solemnly frown upon it, some are interested but say outright that it is impossible to take the time, others accede . . . with a growl, but a surprisingly large number applaud the idea and undertake the task (and it is no light labor) with good will.

March 2. My mother, Miss Fuller & I are to go this afternoon to an amateur performance in Brattle Hall of scenes from Miss Alcott's *Little Women*. . . . What curious marked contrasts sometimes present themselves! There are a few minutes to wait after luncheon, and I pick up Daudet's *Sappho* which is lying on my table. A dramatization of the book has lately been brought out in New York & has produced a scandal & prosecution for indecency, & this has naturally caused a demand for the book in the Library. There is a difference of opinion whether such a book should be in the "Inferno" or not, so in order to save discussion & explanation I put the book in my pocket some days ago & enquirers are now told that it is out. . . . The performance [of *Little Women*] was really delightful, simply and naturally done, full of sentiment to be sure, but sound & innocent, and a pleasant change not only from the foulness of Sappho but from the greater complexity & extravagance of here & now.

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER, *Alford Professor of Philosophy.*

March 1. My lecture work for the present Half-Year is comparatively light. Phil. 1b The History of Modern Philosophy Tues. Th. Sat. 1:30, & in Radcliffe Tu. Th. Sat. at 11. Phil. 20d The Ethics of Kant & Hegel, a seminar of 10 graduate students, meeting in my library from 4 to 6 on Mondays. . . . This month too I am doing less work because during the preceding period of Mid Year Examination I gave a course of 6 lectures at Western Reserve University—(with 4 others at various places en route) & afterwards 8 lectures at Dartmouth College, the whole period covered being 3 weeks & I receiving $650.00 in payment. . . . At Dartmouth I also preached on Sunday morning, though announcing that I was only a layman. During these journeys I became somewhat fatigued & am trying now to loaf a little.

EVAN RANDOLPH, *Harvard College freshman.*

March 1. This morning my alarm clock woke me up at twenty minutes of nine and I hustled into my clothes and ran for my first lecture, Government 1. This course is held in Upper Massachusetts [Hall] and is given by Professor McVane. He is probably a very learned man, but a darn stupid lecturer, so I wrote my daily theme in there instead of listening. He let us out a quarter of an hour early and I rushed over and

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had breakfast and then scurried over to an English 22 conference with Mr. Miller. Miller pulled my themes to pieces in great shape, but as he gave me C in the course for the first half year I don't feel that I can curse him out with a clear conscience. After the conference I went back to my room and read until twelve when I went to the gymnasium to train. Lathrop made me do the regular work at the chest weights and the dumb-bell exercise and then sent me out for a mile and a quarter run on the track. It was pouring at the time, so I got drenched and had the pleasure of being laughed at by the fellows doing physics in the Jefferson lab. . . . After putting on my clothes I went to lunch and hurried through in order to get to English 22 on time at half past one. Barrett Wendell gave us a long drool and then asked us to report it for our daily theme. I hope he enjoyed reading them. After English 22 I went home again and pegged away at German until six oclock. I don't remember studying so hard since I have been at college.

March 3. Bur-lang went the alarm clock at twenty minutes of eight and I jumped into my clothes and ran for the Government conference in Sever at eight. . . . At nine oclock after the conference I had breakfast and then did a little cramming for a history 1 conference, that I had with Stobbs at ten twenty. When I got there I jollied him along and bluffed the rest, so that I got a pretty good mark. After the conference I loafed until twelve when I went to the gym to train. Clark, White, Knowles and I had a half mile race and I brought up the tail at the finish. After training I had lunch and then studied until four when I took a bath and changed my clothes. This operation being finished I went to see Mr. Lane about this tommy-rot of a diary and then walked over to Chestnut Hill. . . .

March 4. I went to church for the second time since Christmas. Mr. Nash, the rector in his sermon spoke of this scheme of keeping a diary. He cursed it out in great shape and said that it would be a failure for sure, because no one could keep a diary that would interest people two generations from now.

EDISON LEWIS, *sophomore.*

March 2. This morning I rose at my customary hour—eight o'clock—and having taken my bath and dumb-bell exercise, which I have to take to strengthen my collar bone, which I dislocated last fall in football, I went to the Zeta Psi Club for breakfast. Here I was glad to hear that the English had releived Ladysmith which had been besieged for 118 days by the Boers. I attended my lecture in Geology B—on meteorology—at 10 o'clock; and at 11 had an English 31 conference with Mr. Gardiner where I discussed with him and Barrett Wendell the advisability of writing up this diary. I then went to Leavitt & Peirce's and played billiards with Curtis Clay until 12 when I went to History 2. I went to the Zeta Psi for a hurried lunch and afterwards to Dean Briggs to try to get a fellow, who had been expelled, back into college. I think I was unsuccessful. Thence I went to the A.D. Club and found "Peter" Higginson debating over his request for the proposed diary. I tried to get my father over the telephone but could not. Returned to my room found a notice from Cram the recorder to come between 2 & 4 o'clock; so went and was asked if I intended to drop Botany 1. I said "yes." . . .

I got dressed for a dinner at the Zeta Psi. . . . The dinner, $2.50 if you please, was a great success. It was funny to see all the great variety of drinks on the table: from "horse's necks" to champagne. Everybody got to feeling pretty lively. The President "Bob" Livermore called on several fellows to sing. After coffee we sat around the table and sang all the popular songs of the day: they were mostly coon songs. After this a three gallon loving cup of champagne went the rounds at the expense of those who failed to join in with the right line, as it came their turn, in the following song:

1. Bugger me eye	2. the ship's a sinking
3. Bugger me eye	4. we'll all be drowned
5. Bugger me eye	6. we'll go to the bottom
7. Bugger me eye	8. we'll never be found.

We had a few more songs at the piano. I then played a game of "bottle" pool with Arthur Morse and Kenneth Budd. We then went home to bed.

GEORGE RUSSELL STOBBS, *first-year law student, teaching fellow, and proctor in Weld Hall.*

March 3. Last night was the occasion of our great annual punch—meaning by our—the History Table at Memorial. . . . No undergraduate is allowed to "come on" the table. [The event] surpassed all our ideas or imaginations of what a successful "Punch" would be. Sargent—the one

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who concocted the mixture, presided. He had been engaged in its preparation for a week—at least the punch had been in preparation all that time. Viles, Newhall & I formed a triumvirate to see which could last the longest. We started in at the very outset very heavily and were soon in a jolly mood. The others were not far behind us. With each successive acquisition to our numbers—some came later than the rest—our welcome became more noisy. We started out with drinking Sargent's health. Someone proposed the health of McKinley which was drunk with great show of patriotism by some & was hissed by others. President Kruger of the South African Republic also met a pro & con reception when his health was proposed. The one name we all toasted harmoniously was that of Lord Roberts, the successful British general in South Africa. As the evening progressed, various individuals began to show or exhibit qualities hitherto unknown or at least unrevealed either to themselves perhaps and surely to the rest of us. Oh, the songs we heard, and the stories that were told & the original poetry inflicted on us . . . . All were cordially—in fact uproariously received—at least the "Yard Cop" seemed to think so for he appeared on two separate occasions to expostulate. We soothed his wounded feelings with a glass of punch each time & he departed somewhat mollified. As regards the triumvirate, Viles won out—that is, he preserved the greatest semblance of dignity of the three of us. Newhall, I am sorry to say lost his very early in the evening & never found it again. I was fortunately able to strike the happy medium where I was in a condition to see the funny side of everything & to appear as funny myself (or at least I suppose I was.) and yet keep my head withal and know everything that was going on. Altogether it was a glorious occasion.

But the next day. Shall I ever forget it. It seems as if I never would, writing on the night of it as I am at the present time. By a strange irony of fate, I was obliged to get up this morning, according to a request from the office and in my capacity of Proctor of Weld Hall report "as to a riotous punch" held within the limits of my domain or sovereignty the evening before. I gathered myself together as well as I could and marched up to the Regent and delivered my report. It took courage. It took all the self control I had, for my head was splitting with a headache & my appearance must at least been woebegon. And yet in this condition, I had to hold conferences for three hours this morning, and thro' it all, try to appear awake and more or less aware of what was going on. It was a dreadful ordeal and I thought I should never get thro' with it.

March 11. I observe a characteristic creeping in . . . of the air surrounding the college & absorbed by us—*viz*—a characteristic of blaséness, if I may so call it—a tendency to "damn" everything, to find nothing satisfactory—or at least to fall into ecstasies over nothing, never to become enthusiastic & without being absolutely cynical to the extreme, yet to view everything with more or less the point of view of the cynic. For this, I think Harvard is to blame.

HARRY KELLOGG DURLAND, *special student.*

March 1. March has come in like a lion. The rain is falling and the flood descending. After several lectures I went to Roxbury to meet a friend who is interested in some Italians in Boston, whose pictures she desired to take. . . . It was too stormy to take pictures so we came over to Cambridge and heard William Dean Howells lecture on "Liberty and Equality." I don't know why Mr. Howells should suppose that he knows anything whatever about liberty or equality. His lecture was neither witty nor brilliant, in truth if anyone save William Dean Howells had given it I would call it stupid.

I wonder how much of Mr. Howells' literary work will stand the test of sixty years? He is an interesting man, but I cannot call him great. No more can I call Mr. Rudyard Kipling one of the world's great writers. Here I may be venturing a rash opinion. Mr. Kipling stands distinctly at the head of living literary men, but while I acknowledge him as a genius, willy nilly, I can see no signs of lasting greatness in his work. It is pleasant enough to pick up his poems occasionally, but his prose strikes me as dull and uninteresting. I stand almost alone in my circle of acquaintances in my opinion of Mr. Kipling.

ADAMS SHERMAN HILL, *Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory.*

March 4. I spent the morning in reading Dumas, and in wasting time over the *Sunday Herald.* I wonder whether Sunday newspapers will exist in 1960, or if they do exist whether they will be larger or smaller than at present. They are now a resource for people who read noth-

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ing else, but a burden for the rest of the world.

For myself I may say that I am not a churchgoer at all. When I was married I said that I would go to church wherever my wife went. As she never has been well enough to go at all, I have kept my promise.

March 16. I wonder whether men of science will ever master the elementary principles of meteorology sufficiently to be able to foretell the weather with approximate accuracy. Last night and this morning the prophets, as reported by the paper, promised heavy snow, north wind, and low temperature. There was snow last night, but this morning it is raining hard, the wind is from the south, and the thermometer at 55.

LUCY SPRAGUE, *Radcliffe College senior.*

March 1. As I was most uncertain as to my fate after college, I have taken a rather general course. My chief interest has been Philosophy, in which subject I shall try to take honors this Spring. My aim is to fit myself for an architect or landscape gardiner. But I feel that I owe my parents, neither of whom is strong, at least one year before I begin a course in architecture. So I expect to spend next winter in California—possibly teaching, and then come East again to take a course of training for a profession. I have enjoyed college thoroughly and gained much from it—in health quite as much as anything else. I wish it were beginning instead of ending.

March 6. At three thirty I went to Brown and Nichols for Music 3. Prof. [John Knowles] Paine was usually dry. He certainly is no teacher whatever he may be as a composer.

Mr. Paine was more ridiculous than ever. He *sang* some Schumann songs to us which almost made me disgrace myself. Then at the end he played his "Moorish Dances" which are to be given tomorrow for the first time by the Boston Symphony. He grunts and pants when he is playing and makes the most awful faces. . . .

WILLIAMINA PATON FLEMING, *Curator of Astronomical Photographs at the Harvard Observatory.*

March 12. During the morning's work on correspondence etc. I had some conversation with the director regarding women's salaries. He seems to think that no work is too much or too hard for me, no matter what the responsibility or how long the hours. But let me raise the question of salary and I am immediately told that I receive an excellent salary as women's salaries stand. If he would only take some step to find out how much he is mistaken in regard to this he would learn a few facts that would open his eyes and set him thinking. Sometimes I feel tempted to give up and let him try some one else, or some of the men to do my work, in order to have him find out what he is getting for $1500 a year from me, compared with $2500 from some of the other assistants. Does he ever think that I have a home to keep and a family to take care of as well as the men? But I suppose a woman has no claim to such comforts. And this is considered an enlightened age!

ANNA BELLE EISENHOWER, *Radcliffe senior.*

March 12. I'm going to tell you a little about Prof. Kittredge, our English professor, and my love. He has the Shakespeare class and if Shakespeare knew as much about what he was writing as Prof. K does, he was indeed a wonder. Prof. K really knows about everything. I can't bear to think of how much poorer the world will be after he dies and he doesn't take a bit good care of himself either—sits up till 2 a.m. and lives on black coffee and cigars. He's also the most patient man I ever saw. You can never tire him by questions no matter how simple they are ("simple" not to be taken in sense of "foolish" but of "perfectly evident"). The only speck on the sun is his lack of enthusiasm in his classes. Once in a while something in a play we're reading will stir him up but as a usual thing he's quite calm. His smile! —it's worth your whole life to have him look smilingly down upon you when you've asked him a question or done something that appeals to him as worthy of his commendation. Hamlet is what we're studying now. We use the recitation method—and study the plays just as we would a foreign language. Sometimes Prof. K says such funny things. "If S's genius is in his plots, the Lord help him.". . .

March 17. I wish I kept up better with the events of the day . . . . I know nothing of the affairs of the world at large. I know there's a Boer War going on in South Africa, that Kentucky politics are in a very bad state, once in a while an occasional rumor about Dewey—and that's all.

KATHARINE FULLERTON, *Radcliffe senior.*

March 18. We Radcliffe girls—thanks chiefly to our brothers who have learned at Harvard to

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be intolerant of us—are all bent, consciously or unconsciously, upon proving to the world that we are something besides "grinds," that we know how to enjoy ourselves, *nous aussi*. . . . We have more prejudice to overcome than Wellesley or Smith or Vassar; the gentlemen across the way can never quite forgive us our existence, and above all our close academic relation with them.

I think they are becoming more tolerant now. I remember perfectly that my brother Rob who graduated in 1890, felt convinced that Radcliffe would ruin me for life: Will, an '86 man, kept discreetly quiet. But the feeling is disappearing rapidly, I think; and the old school of Harvard men detested Radcliffe far more than the new school—of the last six years, I mean—does. And it certainly speaks well for Radcliffe that in spite of the prejudice and the disadvantages, not one Radcliffe girl would have been willing to go to any other college—not Smith or Vassar or even Bryn Mawr. If any women's college in the land has a future before it, surely it is Radcliffe.

HARRIE ROGERS CHAMBERLIN, *Harvard junior.*

March 21. The war drags on in Africa, the English apparently gaining steadily. Of our own war in the Phillipines is little certain knowledge. Some say it is practically over, others that little has been accomplished. There is little doubt the main thing the American occupation has brought is the saloon. Hundreds are flourishing in Manilla and the president does nothing to abate the evil. The Porto Rico matter has also stirred popular indignation against President McKinley. He first advocated free trade with her. Then—apparently instigated by the sugar and rum trusts—urged a tariff. Congress has so far supported him—so favoring Imperialism as opposed to Expansion. The Constitution does not follow the flag nearly so readily as does the saloon. Meanwhile are rumors of great wars—Russia pressing England all through the East.

JOHN FREDERICK NEAL, *third-year law student and College dormitory proctor in Holyoke House.*

March 23. Was rudely awakened at three a.m. by two of my students who were beastly drunk. They had evidently become tired after experiencing the difficulties of climbing a flight of stairs in their condition, and had decided to camp out on our landing, whereas they belonged one flight further up. When I appeared on the scene they hustled off as well as they were able. It was laughable to see them try to conceal their condition, but I managed to keep my face severe and jawed them in good style—then went back to the room, but as soon as I heard one of them "putting his lunch" I hustled up-stairs to direct his effusions into some proper receptacle. Fortunately he had found the bath tub, and was letting fly in there. The moment he saw me he began "Mr. Neal—damn good man, damn good man, lem'me alone—g'way lem'me be." I told him if he didn't cut that short and get to bed, I'd smash him and then haul him up; and further, I told his chum, who wasn't so drunk that if I saw any of that stuff around when I came up to the bathroom before dressing for breakfast, I'd make them both remember it for a year and a day. Then I turned in, but couldn't get to sleep for some time. The noise ceased; and when I went up about 7:30, everything was as clean as could be.

Some dormitories are much harder to handle than others. This one used to be a terror. They had cleaned out two proctors before I arrived, and started in with me: but thanks to an efficient backing at the office, I stopped that inside of a week. . . .

WILLIAM MORROW, *senior.*

March 29. I left Cambridge for New York on Wednesday the 21st on the one o'clock train. I was provided with letters of introduction to many of the New York publishers and newspaper men, and was anxious to learn all I could about the publishing business, and find if possible some opportunity or opening in the publishing business that might eventually allow me to use whatever critical ability I may have. . . .

I met and talked at some length with many men in the publishing business—perhaps a dozen in all—and from them learned much of what I wanted to know. I found that even if one's ultimate desire was to engage in literary work of the kind that I might be able to do, one ought really to enter the business department, and work up from that, learning the business thoroughly, and taking advantage of every opportunity to show one's capacity. Ordinary critical and literary work is of all commodities the cheapest, and the performance of it alone gives few opportunities for advancement. Among the publishers, every thought is for the

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business value of an enterprise or project: ideals of literature have no place with them. The question is: will it pay? A man who wants to promote the best in literature must hold his ideals very tenaciously if he is to go through a training in a publishing house, and in the end accomplish what he set out to do. . . .

March 30. During the evening I had a meeting of the Phi Beta Kappa Society at my room. A little more than half of them came and "jollied up" first rate, finishing all the refreshments I had provided. It's a great pity that our best scholars (or rather the men with the highest marks), as well as our debaters, should be so lacking in general social, and, I am tempted to say, general masculine qualities. Our class's representation in the Phi Beta Kappa Society is perhaps as good as that of any class, yet I doubt if there are more than eight men out of the twenty-five who are at all men of force, or of broad human interests, and who impress others as being human.

ALFRED MARSTON TOZZER, *senior.*

March 8. After an early rehearsal [for the Pi Eta Club show], another fellow and I went to see Julia Marlowe in *Barbara Frietchie.* . . . This is the first time I have been to the theatre for three weeks. I don't know when it has been so long before. A quarter almost of Boston's theatre audiences are made up of Harvard men. The cars are simply packed coming and going. . . . The rush and jam at the Park Street entrance to the subway is like that of a foot-ball game.

This afternoon, when I was changing my clothes, a knock came on my door. I heard the flutter of skirts so I did not yell my usual "Come in!" It turned out to be a girl from Lynn with her chaperon and two fellows. They were going to take in Vespers, then to the "Touraine" to dinner and the theatre. One has to use care on Thursdays about going around the corridor in negligee for the buildings are usually full of women and girls on that day in the week.

To invite some girls to your room and then to Vespers is the only form of entertainment possible here at college. . . . You meet your guests in Boston or at the Car Station in Harvard Square, conduct them to your room where you give them some poor chocolate or poorer tea, crackers, olives and candy. They will ask you to play for them. I always play the music from the latest comic opera or a song. Then if they are here for the first time, you take them to see the "glass flowers" or the gym. And finally you land them at the chapel. Vespers consists of two anthems, usually a solo, two prayers, and a fifteen minute talk by the minister who happens to be officiating at the time. Everyone is whispering and no one pays the least attention to the service.

Until this year the next move in the programme was to take them up in the gallery of Memorial Hall to see the "animals feed". . . The gallery was packed with people, all trying to pick out their friends. The students did their part to recognize their friends and sometimes those who were not their friends. The prettiest girls were always decided upon and commented upon by the table as a whole. But now all is different. The gallery is vacant. The change of rule came about because of the unladylike actions of two girls who wandered up there alone one night.

March 13. To-day I had an excellent practical joke played on me in Thayer [Hall]. The fellows have been laying for me for two weeks but the conditions were not right until to-night. The idea was to stick a tin funnel into the band of your trousers and try to drop a coin from your chin into the funnel. While my head was bent back with the coin on my chin, one of the boys kindly poured a pitcher of water down the funnel. The room was full of men and there I stood with the water running down inside my trousers. But I did not get mad. Oh! No I took the Joke and let them have the laugh on me. They say this is a very ancient joke, but I never heard of it before.

March 27. The pain of leaving this dear old place came upon me very forcibly to-day as the talk turned about reengaging rooms for the next college year. I dread to think of the time when I shall be separated from Harvard. Some boys, I know, will be glad to get away. Such boys are wrong somewhere. The matter is not with the College but with the boys. Each man has to find his special place here in college as in society at large, but where he once finds it, there is not a more delightful more enchanting abiding place than right here at Harvard College.

LUCY ALLEN PATON, *Radcliffe graduate student.*

March 2. When March 2nd arrived, it found me seated in my easy chair, reading critically the last completed chapter of my dissertation, the subject of which I purposely refrain from mentioning, for I think that you, gentle reader, will

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doubtless discover it before long. The outcome of my perusal was a mental diatribe upon the attempts of women to win true scholarship. A woman who could make a serious contribution to learning is a monstrosity, an abortion, a blot upon the face of nature; she is distorting her intellectual powers to purposes for which they were never intended. The result is unsymmetrical and weak, and she as a consequence is ridiculous in the eyes of men who are scholars. Evidently my dissertation is limping; it is also very early in its day.

After an interval of oblivion and breakfast, I returned to my dissertation. At ten o'clock I went to Radcliffe to Italian III . . . . On my way out of the building, Miss Coes hailed me, and told me that Mr. Lane would like Radcliffe to co-operate in the journalistic scheme. . . . I did not say how I had begun the day, but since it was Miss Coes who asked me, to whom I never can refuse anything, I am beginning my record. "But, Cosey," I said, "It's a futile scheme; the really important elements of our lives we do not trust ourselves to record where they will ever be seen. It will be only the shell that's described; he who reads in the future will, as it were, sit among husks—poor innocent, all unwittingly a prodigal son." And she agreed with me. Cosey's always right.

The rest of the day I have spent with Morgain la Fée, with the bottom of my black poplin skirt which needed repairing, and with some further details of the relief of Ladysmith, gleaned from the *Transcript;* and now my clock tells me that I have entered on March 3.

March 15. Today I again have administered healing potions to the family, and have coughed. Everybody has the influenza.

March 18. St. Patrick's Day my record was neglected, not because I was doing honor to the saint but because I was engrossed with nursing my family. Dissertation received scant attention; I would just start a connection between facts when it would be time to administer cough mixture or whiskey. I hope that "grip" will be an unheard of complaint in 1960, for it is a serious calamity to have befall one now.

March 31. And now, gentle reader, March is finished. "The work is ended. Let the scribe be without crime." You have not learned the important elements of my life, gentle reader, from this record. They lie where they are beyond the power of record. I hope that you have gained a picture of one phase in the life of the community where I dwell. This month has not been a typical month, for I have seen less of friends and have studied more closely than is my wont. But as I have glanced over my record, I appreciate as I never have appreciated before that though the lives that I have contact with in these four weeks are not many in number, they are every one, without exception every one, those that are in touch with the highest and best. Strong and earnest and true I think they are, and he who dwells in the atmosphere that they make is blest. This has been a somewhat gruesome task. When the record is read, we who love and hope and walk and talk together all shall be gone from this fair earth; and you and your *comperes,* gentle reader, will fill our places, and for some of these dear lives that I have mentioned, you yourselves will be the nobler. I would know who you are, gentle reader, that read the record that ends with the evening of March 31, 1900. Whoe'er you be,

> Say not good night,
> But in some brighter clime
> Bid me good morning.

Editor's note: When the Chest of 1900 was unsealed in the mid-1960s, George Russell Stobbs *and* Lucy Sprague (Mitchell) *were still living. The former had practiced law in Massachusetts; the latter founded the experimental school that is now New York City's Bank Street College of Education.*

Lucy Allen Paton *received her Ph.D.—one of the first two to be granted by Radcliffe—in 1902. She later wrote a biography of the college's first president, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz.*

By 1900, Williamina Paton Fleming *was already an internationally known expert on stellar spectra; two years earlier she had received the first Harvard appointment given to a woman. At her death in 1911 (of pneumonia, at 54), she was America's most famous female astronomer.*

Katharine Fullerton *married a Princeton professor, Gordon Gerould, and became an accomplished essayist.* Alfred Marston Tozzer, *a Harvard faculty member from 1905 to 1947, was recognized as the preeminent Middle American archaeologist of his time.* William Morrow *made a successful career in publishing, launching his own New York firm in 1926.*

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• BOOKS •

REREADING

Fitzgerald's Afterglow

GEOFF DYER

Though it was *The Great Gatsby* we were "doing" for A level, not *Tender Is the Night*, my English teacher got me to read it anyway. I was seventeen and remembered practically nothing about it—but I never quite forgot it.

This, it turns out, is a not uncommon reaction, or at least a variant of a fairly common one. Putting into practice an idea he'd "got from Conrad's preface to *The Nigger,*" Fitzgerald believed that "the purpose of a work of fiction is to appeal to the lingering after-effects in the reader's mind." He was responding to some surly comments about *Tender* from Hemingway, who, as if succumbing to exactly those "lingering after-effects," later told Maxwell Perkins of a "strange thing" about Fitzgerald, namely that "in retrospect his *Tender Is the Night* gets better and better." John Updike bounces this kind of response back into the work itself. "As so often in Fitzgerald," he writes, "we have only the afterglow of a dream to see by."

I don't remember when I read *Tender* for the second time. Even the note scribbled in the front of my Penguin edition is uncertain: "Read 2, 3 times (?) before this, Paris, April/May 92." I had gone to Paris in 1991 to write a novel that (I hoped) was going to be a contemporary version of *Tender Is the Night*, so the afterglow of those undated rereadings was, evidently, still strong. (George Steiner is right: "latent in every act of complete reading is the compulsion to write a book in reply.") Appropriately enough, I made little progress with my novel and, after a visit to the battlefields of northern France, abandoned it in favor of a book about the Great War. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that, when I reread *Tender* in the spring of 1992, it seemed a book saturated with the memory of the First World War or—as Fitzgerald himself put it—"the broken universe of the war's ending."

"This Western front business couldn't be done again, not for a long time," Dick Diver explains during a visit to the battlefields of the Western Front in 1925. "This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation between the classes." That's the passage that always gets quoted, but the book is dominated throughout by what Dick terms, in a half-ironic phrase, "Non-combatant's shell-shock." On the very first page, as he makes his way to Zurich, Dick encounters "the long trains of blinded or one-legged men, or dying trunks." The expensive clinic where he meets Nicole is "a refuge for the broken, the incomplete, the menacing." Nicole's mental instability may not be related to the war—"The war is over," she tells Dick in a letter, "and I scarcely knew there was a war"—but it is constantly associated with it. Her smile is "like all the lost youth in the world." Lost youth is, of course, a perpetual theme of Fitzgerald's, but there is often a larger historical dimension to a writer's most intimate concerns. "Life hasn't much to offer except youth," he wrote in a letter of 1917, "and every man I've met who's been to war, that is this war, seems to have lost youth and faith in man."

Geoff Dyer's books include *Out of Sheer Rage: Wrestling with D. H. Lawrence; Paris Trance: A Romance;* and *But Beautiful: A Book About Jazz.*

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All around Nicole at the clinic, meanwhile, are those mentally maimed, however vicariously, by the war: "shell-shocks who merely heard an air raid from a distance" or "merely read newspapers." Despite Nicole's immense wealth, even the idyllic period of courtship is surrounded by the ominous sounds of war: "Suddenly there was a booming from the wine slopes across the lake; cannons were shooting at hail-bearing clouds in order to break them." Most subtly and significantly of all, the battlefields of northern France, where the dead lie "like a million bloody rugs," are twinned, through this image, with the Riviera and "its bright tanned prayer rug of a beach."

Having got the Great War out of my system, I did eventually write my Paris novel, but I didn't actually read *Tender* again until I did so to write this piece. The book I reencountered was radically different from the one I had read before. Quite literally: I had always read the version reorganized by Fitzgerald, edited by Malcolm Cowley, and first published in 1951. This time I read the original version, beginning not with Dick seeing the wounded on his way to Zurich but with Rosemary's first glimpse of the Divers on the French Riviera.

From Hemingway on, Fitzgerald's fellow writers have felt free to maintain an attitude of smug superiority toward his achievements. In the most wonderfully snobby aside of all, E. M. Cioran remarks on "what seems an incomprehensible thing to me: T. S. Eliot wrote to Fitzgerald that he had read *The Great Gatsby* three times!" After watching the movie of *Tender*—"a very good film of a rather poor book"—Evelyn Waugh concluded, ambivalently, that "the enormously expensive apparatus of the film studio can produce nothing as valuable as can one half-tipsy Yank with a typewriter." For Gore Vidal, "very little" of what the "barely literate" Fitzgerald wrote "has any great value as literature."

On this latest rereading, I feared, at first, that Vidal was right. In places, the writing in these early pages is strikingly inept, as when Rosemary, feeling the "impactive scrutiny" of strangers on the beach, notices the "brash navel" and "facetious whiskers" of a man with a monocle. It all felt like someone trying to make his writing interesting—what Nick Carraway calls "a strained counterfeit of perfect ease"—and succeeding only in drawing attention to its failings. Writing often works best when the reader is oblivious to it, when he can respond to its effects without being conscious of how they are achieved. And so it was here—after a while. Once I got through that initially uncomfortable period of settling in, I fell under Fitzgerald's tender spell as subtly as Dick's guests fall under their host's. His gift for making people believe in the world he creates while "leaving little communicable memory of what he had said or done" is of a piece with the effect—more accurately, the lingering after-effect—of *Tender* itself. Other incidental observations hint at this quality of evocative reverberation. Utterly infatuated, Rosemary catches only the gist of Dick's sentences and supplies "the rest from her unconscious, as one picks up the striking of a clock in the middle with only the rhythm of the first uncounted strokes lingering in the mind."

It is often thought that Fitzgerald was as besotted by elegance and the wealth on which it is predicated as the teenage Rosemary is by Dick. This is such a distorting simplification of an author who read Marx and conceived of Dick as "a man like myself," "a communist-liberal-idealist, a moralist in revolt," that one wonders at its capacity to persist. Fitzgerald wrote in a 1938 letter, "I have never been able to forgive the rich for being rich, and it has colored my entire life and works." He was the most materialist of romantics, the most romantic of materialists. As representatives of the "furthermost evolution of a class," the Divers incarnate a way of life that, in its apparent transcendence of all material concerns, is enviably idyllic. But Fitzgerald was one of the first writers to grasp the enervating horror of infinite leisure (in Jane Austen it is simply assumed). Given limitless time and freedom, everything, as Dick eventually blurts out to Mary North, comes to seem "damned dull." Realizing the extent to which Nicole's wealth serves "to belittle his own work," Dick sits "listening to the buzz of the electric clock, listening to time." Not the time of striking hours, but blank, undifferentiated time. In this eternity of leisure, it is inevitable that Dick, though conscious that he has "lost himself," cannot "tell

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the hour when, or the day or the week, or the month or the year."

About the larger system of global degradation on which this leisure and its attendant virtues of poise and elegance depend, Fitzgerald is, by contrast, explicit and exact: for Nicole's sake, "girls canned tomatoes quickly in August or worked rudely at the Five-and-Tens on Christmas Eve; half-breed Indians toiled on Brazilian coffee plantations." Poise itself is thereby tainted by the exploitation that finances its cultivation.

If poise and degradation are inescapably entwined, then so too—as in the "Ode to a Nightingale," from which Fitzgerald took his title—are rapture and despondency, celebration and lament. Early in the novel, Nicole observes one of Dick's "most characteristic moods," "the excitement that swept everyone up into it and was inevitably followed by his own form of melancholy, which he never displayed but at which she guessed." From this cocktail of entangled emotions emerges what Philip Larkin—in "For Sidney Bechet," another, very different elegy for the Jazz Age—calls the "long-haired grief and scored pity" of the book. Writing it demanded from Fitzgerald a willingness to believe again in every promise of happiness that had been broken by his life. Hence the most distinctive impression of *Tender:* a beautiful novel about failure.

If the precise trajectory of this failure becomes more difficult to trace with every rereading, this is a tribute to the book's subtlety rather than an indication of a lack. Dick's disintegration is, of course, a prism refracting Fitzgerald's own. Indeed, the three-way relation between the fictional world Fitzgerald created, the Fitzgeralds as they actually were, and the synthetic *myth* of the Fitzgeralds that emerged from this interrelation is as central to the enduring popularity of Fitzgerald's work as it is to the dissenting view that his popularity is based on meager literary merit. Rather than disentangling these strands, consider, for a moment, just how intimately they are entwined.

While not explicit portraits of Sara and Gerald Murphy, Nicole and Dick are partly derived from them (Hemingway's initial objections to the book had primarily to do with this). At the same time, as John O'Hara pointed out, "sooner or later his characters always come back to being Fitzgerald characters in a Fitzgerald world. . . . Dick Diver ended up as a tall Fitzgerald." This protean connection between the lived and the fictive is suggested by Rebecca West's response to a request for her remembered impressions of Zelda.

West had met the Fitzgeralds on her first visit to New York in 1923–24 and again on the Riviera in 1926. Zelda, West wrote in 1963, "was very plain." "She was standing with her back to me, and her hair was quite lovely, it glistened like a child's. Her face had a certain craggy homeliness. There was a curious unevenness about it, such as one sees in Gericault's pictures of the insane." As West continued to mull over the past, a "very unpleasant memory" came to mind of how Zelda

> had flapped her arms and looked very uncouth as she talked about her ballet ambitions. The odd thing to me always was that Scott Fitzgerald . . . should have liked someone who was so inelegant. But she was not at all unlikeable. There was something very appealing about her. But frightening. Not that one was frightened from one's own point of view, only from hers.

Irrespective of the physical accuracy of West's description of Zelda, this seems to me the single most penetrating insight we have—not into Fitzgerald but into his art (especially if we bear in mind an earlier occasion when West, in precisely the style advocated by Fitzgerald, commented on "the after-image" of Zelda's face). Like William Gedney's picture of Diane Arbus photographing two beauty queens—an image that shows people in the process of being transformed into subject matter—it lays bare the humming circuitry of an artist's imaginative life. It reveals the template that created such famous instances as Gatsby's reunion with Daisy: "There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion." In late 1935, Gerald Murphy conceded to Fitzgerald that "what you said in *Tender Is the Night* is true. Only the invented part of our life,—the unreal part—has had any scheme any beauty." During her first encoun-

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ters with Dick, Rosemary is aware of "an act of creation different from any she had known"; "the intensely calculated perfection" of the Villa Diana becomes evident "through such minute failures as the chance apparition of a maid in the background or the perversity of a cork." West's incidental X-ray reveals the fundamental urge—the creative ontology of the writer—behind these variously arranged contrivings. If Fitzgerald's fascination with wealth derived in part from being "a poor boy in a rich town; a poor boy in a rich boy's school," then it is not surprising to find that elegance and beauty share a similar proximity to plainness and inelegance. In comparable style, his famous lyrical flourishes work best when earthed in the actual and immediate. To make the same point in terms of the symbolic geography of *The Great Gatsby,* the significance of Gatsby's mansion lies not simply in its "meretricious beauty" but in its tragic proximity to the ashheaps of Wilson's garage. By the time of *Tender Is the Night,* this kind of topographic scheme has been subtly dissolved, psychologically internalized. The lyrical and beautiful are constantly flickering into the abject and desolate.

Let me return for a moment to the novel I went to Paris to write. Taking an aspect of *Tender* and adapting it to my own needs, I wanted to write a book about a failure that also depicted an idyllic period in the life of that failure—but I kept failing to write it. Asked if I am disciplined in my working habits, I always respond that I am actively hostile to the idea of writers lashing themselves to their desks for six hours a day, regardless of how they feel. I write when I feel like it, don't when I don't. My inability to make progress with my Paris novel, however, did make me suspect that I had become too self-indulgent, too dissolute in my ways. Perhaps I had been seduced by the version of creativity personified by the junkie saxophonist Art Pepper, who claimed he "never studied, never practiced. . . . All I had to do was reach for it." I kept telling myself that the material I was dealing with was too personal, that I wasn't ready to face it, but I also worried that I simply lacked self-discipline. Failure to write the book gave rise to a less specific sense of failure, so generalized, in fact, that it became part of my life.

And then, quite suddenly, without any conscious effort, I began writing the book. It came fairly easily and, I realized quickly, my earlier failure to write it became an active part in its composition. All sorts of things that had happened in the interim found their place in the book, the most important of which were my experiences with the drug MDMA, or Ecstasy. Fitzgerald, as we all know, was an alcoholic; booze flows like a river through *Tender.* At that time there was a glamour and promise about drinking that has long since dissipated. In a contemporary context, such glamour and promise could be provided only by drugs, and so, naturally, the characters in my *Paris Trance* all take E.

On Rosemary's first evening at the Divers', the guests gather for dinner. "They had been at table half an hour and a perceptible change had set in—person by person had given up something, a preoccupation, an anxiety, a suspicion, and now they were only their best selves and the Divers' guests." This is followed by one of the most famous scenes in the book:

> There were fireflies riding on the dark air and a dog baying on some low and far-away ledge of the cliff. The table seemed to have risen a little toward the sky like a mechanical dancing platform, giving the people around it a sense of being alone with each other in the dark universe, nourished by its only food, warmed by its only lights. And, as if a curious hushed laugh from Mrs. McKisko were a signal that such a detachment from the world had been attained, the two Divers began suddenly to warm and glow and expand. . . . Just for a moment they seemed to speak to everyone at the table, singly and together, assuring them of their friendliness, their affection. And for a moment the faces turned up toward them were like the faces of poor children at a Christmas tree.

Of the many descriptions in contemporary literature of people coming up on E, none surpasses this. According to Borges, the problem with Apollinaire's poetry is that "not a single line allows us to forget the date on which it is written." Certain details in *Tender*—the way Dick is always wearing gloves, or carrying a cane—tie it too closely to the costume drama of the Jazz Age in which it is set, but scenes

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like this show its opposite, timeless quality.

Alcohol befuddles and eventually destroys; over time Ecstasy diminishes the user's capacity to enjoy exactly those feelings that it initially released. The flood of serotonin the drug induces ultimately brings about a radical depletion of serotonin. It is as if there is a certain, finite quantity of happiness that Ecstasy can lead one to use up quickly. Such a notion is very close to what Fitzgerald called, in the title of a story, "Emotional Bankruptcy." As Matthew Bruccoli puts it, the "concept of emotional bankruptcy became a key idea for Fitzgerald. He believed that people have a fixed amount of emotional capital; reckless expenditure results in early bankruptcy."

At the simplest level, Dick ends up—in the words of poet Peter Reading—a "grievously wounded veteran of the / Battle of Bottle." Luke, the central character in my novel, blows a lifetime's happiness in a single year-long splurge. By any normal reckoning he is a failure, but I wanted also to suggest that, in failing, Luke was somehow being true to his destiny. My faith in this notion was strengthened when I read Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*—more exactly, when I read the passage Matthiessen quotes from Jung's "The Development of Personality":

> The fact that many a man who goes his own way ends in ruin means nothing. . . . He *must* obey his own law, as if it were a daemon whispering to him of new and wonderful paths. . . . The only meaningful life [is] a life that strives for the individual realization—absolute and uconditional—of its own peculiar law. . . . To the extent that a man is untrue to the law of his own being . . . he has failed to realize his life's meaning.

This passage of Jung's was obviously derived from Nietzsche, specifically from the essay "Schopenhauer as Educator," one of the *Untimely Meditations*. Sometimes the very pervasiveness of an influence makes it difficult to trace. It is quite possible that my own inkling that an individual's failure might not derive solely from an *in*ability to realize his potential—that, on the contrary, it might come from an ability to access a deeper level of that potential—was nurtured by prolonged exposure to Nietzsche's thought. By the same token, the germ of the idea might also have come from those early, dimly remembered readings of *Tender Is the Night*. On the other hand again, perhaps it was because the germ of this idea was latent in me that I was so susceptible to *Tender* in the first place, and so prone, subsequently, to regard Dick in this somewhat peculiar light.

Certainly, now, in the wake of having written a book that was both a version of *Tender* and an attempt to dramatize this theory of failure/destiny, I see what happens to Dick almost as the opposite of a collapse: a standing firm, an assertion rather than a weakening of will. This is why Dick's failure is accompanied by the affirming sense that he is not falling short of but living up to his destiny, fulfilling it. In related fashion, Cioran believes that *The Crack-Up*, "in which [Fitzgerald] describes his failure, [is] his only great *success*." He also gets as close as anyone to the mysterious heart of *Tender* when he said of the Fitzgeralds' time in Europe—"seven years of waste and tragedy," as Fitzgerald himself termed it—that during this period "they indulged every extravagance, as though haunted by a secret desire to exhaust themselves." Elsewhere, without even referring to Fitzgerald, Cioran writes that "the man who has tendencies toward an inner quest . . . will set failure above any success, he will even seek it out. This is because failure, always essential, reveals us to ourselves, permits us to see ourselves as God sees us, whereas success distances us from what is most inward in ourselves and indeed in everything."

On a more mundane level, Dick is like millions of people who end up settling for a lot less than they had once expected. But he is also, far more unusually, someone who seeks out his "intricate destiny" despite the huge detour of his early success. This is especially arduous since, unlike Nicole, who contains "in herself her own doom," Dick, according to Fitzgerald's notes, is "a superman in possibilities." He has an array of talents and opportunities at his disposal, talents that must, to rephrase things only slightly, be disposed of. First he has to allow his early ambitions to be a good psychiatrist—"maybe to be the greatest one that ever lived"—to dissipate amid the affluence of the world to which Zelda's wealth grants him access. But here too his "fine per-

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sonality" and "great personal charm" (Fitzgerald's notes again) ensure that he becomes a virtual Prospero of the Riviera. To go from here to the small town where he ends up will require not a dissipation but a massive assertion of will. Ostensibly, it might be a lack of strength that leads him to squander his talents, but the further movement into charmless drunkenness and bigotry, brawling and self-ostracism, is as much a rising to the surface of Jung's "daemon" as it is a descent. The belated consummation of his affair with Rosemary is less an act of faithlessness to Nicole than an act of fidelity to a long-buried urge to shatter his life:

> "We can't go on like this," Nicole suggested. "Or can we?—what do you think?" Startled that for the moment Dick did not deny it, she continued, "Some of the time I think it's my fault—I've ruined you."
>
> "So I'm ruined, am I?" he inquired pleasantly.
>
> "I didn't mean that. But you used to want to create things—now you seem to want to smash them up."
>
> She trembled at criticizing him in these broad terms—but his enlarging silence frightened her even more. She guessed that something was developing behind the silence, behind the hard, blue eyes. . . . It was as though an incalculable story was telling itself inside him, about which she could only guess at in the moments when it broke through the surface.

A few pages later, Dick's voice has become "serene" and his face shows "none of the lines of annoyance she had expected. It was even detached." And then, as if to hint, delicately, at the extent of Dick's achievement, Fitzgerald grants him a kind of lyrical—almost a signature—blessing. "He turned away from her, toward the veil of starlight over Africa."

In this light, the episode of supreme humiliation—when he fails to perform on the board a gymnastic feat he would have "done with ease only two years ago"—is actually a definitive triumph. Word has already got around that "Dick is no longer a serious man," and, as if to validate such rumors, he inflicts a kind of tragic slapstick on himself. Three times he tries—even though on the third attempt he "couldn't have lifted a paper doll"—and three times he fails to get up on the board, his impotence made embarrassingly public. From this point on—Nicole regards him with "contempt," "everything he did annoyed her now"—there is nothing to endear him to anyone. No one stands in his way. He is free, free at last, to realize his true and wretched destiny.

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On the Money Trail

DEIRDRE McCLOSKEY

THE CASH NEXUS:
MONEY AND POWER IN THE MODERN WORLD, 1700–2000
by Niall Ferguson. Basic Books. $30.

Niall Ferguson, a startlingly young professor of the history of politics and finance at Oxford, is a force of nature, or at any rate a force of book marketing in British (and now world) historical circles. His debut was a mere six years ago, yet he's already produced a heavy tome on the Great War (*The Pity of War,* an international best-seller); two thick books on the Rothschilds (also best-sellers); an edited collection of historical counterfactuals, or what-if scenarios (another best-seller); a monograph on Hamburg business and the politics of inflation before Hitler; and now a volume on all these subjects combined.

The Cash Nexus reads like a splendid set of lectures to bright undergraduates about, well, Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700–2000, down to the well-organized university lecturer's trademark teaser at the end of each lecture/chapter. An attentive class would emerge sophisticated about many things well worth being sophisticated about: the wages of war since 1700, the size of governments, the workings of the money market, the handling of public debt. And the quasi-conservative themes they would find themselves hanging it all on are these: that the economy does not determine everything—the "cash nexus" is important, but not simple or mechanical or inevitable, despite the current widespread assumption that market forces trump all others; and that out there it's still a dangerous world, whether money or missiles are on the line—a world that requires a Top Nation to keep the peace.

"In the beginning was war," Ferguson declares at the outset. He goes on to present in fascinating detail the statistics of deadly quarrels, tracing financial history through the annals of warfare. Economically motivated or not, wars have always required economic ingenuity, compelling rulers to develop efficient ways of collecting monies from their subjects. As the historian of the Rothschilds is well placed to demonstrate, fluctuations in the cost of war "have been the driving force of financial innovation." Under late capitalism, however, contrary to the more vulgar anti-capitalist notions that link prosperity with bloodshed, the share of war in governmental expenditure has not risen. It has declined, constituting a virtual "demilitarization of the West" and "the transformation of the warfare state into the welfare state."

Are taxes, then, whether collected to fight wars or to finance a social safety net, the nexus between the economy and the rest of history? No, not reliably. An extensive taxation system has often been supposed to presage a strong democracy, but as Ferguson notes, it only sometimes led to democratic representation—most famously in Britain and America, but not in places farther east and south, in which the bureaucracy of an autocratic Prussia could increasingly perform the revenue-gathering trick. And yet early-eighteenth-century Britain had three times as many tax collectors per capita as did France, and nearly thirty times as many as Prussia. Here, at least, the beginnings of democracy and taxes seem related. Having seized an early economic advantage, nineteenth-century Britain emerges as the protagonist, its financial innovations widely imitated around the world.

Other than taxes or press gangs, borrowing was the way governments could get their gun

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money, and Ferguson is an entrancing guide to this and other mysteries of finance. Unlike most historians—even historians of the economy, even historians of bonds and inflations—he has troubled to read the economists, and explains them lucidly and accurately to the rest of us. For example: a prudent government issuing bonds will avoid default, keep inflation low, and keep its needs modest enough that growth in the economy (and therefore in receipts from taxes) will make repayments easy; otherwise the market will punish it with high interest rates. Ferguson shows how imprudent governments from royalist France to socialist Russia have been ruined by these links between "past misdeeds and present interest rates," facing revolution on the bourse or in the streets.

Even a prudent government, however, cannot lay down the future. The cash nexus is severed, Ferguson notes again, since unforeseeable events as much as economic inevitabilities run the show. Ferguson is here expanding a theme in his earlier work on war and "counterfactual" histories. The British did not have to go to the aid of France in 1914, he has argued; the Rothschilds did not have to be so frightfully clever. Yet they did, and they were, and history veered off the tracks of class and interest and money. Even when the debt was democratized and turned to social purposes, Ferguson argues, politics was not so simple as voting one's pocketbook. The Left and Right concur with each other on the contrary assertion, that the cash nexus is unbreakable. The Golden Rule applies: those who have gold, rule. In the first half of his course of lectures Ferguson replies, Not so fast.

The early parts of Ferguson's book, then, are part of a reaction to the economistic reduction of history to money. Economists—those "worldly philosophers," as the late Robert Heilbroner called them—study the virtue of fiscal Prudence in the conduct of world affairs. Adam Smith at least put Prudence in a context with the other pagan and Christian virtues, but his followers have not. Marxist or bourgeois, economists over the past couple of centuries have insisted that Prudence (or the lack of it) explains all. Want to understand the history of the past three centuries in the West? Follow the money, say the Left and Right. Not so fast, Ferguson says again (and I agree): what of Courage and Cowardice, Love and Hate?

Late in his book Ferguson turns pessimistic, and with this later theme I have less sympathy. His is not exactly the millennial pessimism of George Soros, say, or Ravi Batra—whose *The Great Depression of 1990*, written in 1987, I bought on the remainder table in 1993. Ferguson does not believe the sky is falling, that we are about to be impoverished. But something is worrying him, though it's never quite clear what. He admits, for example, that democracy seems to have progressed recently, moving into a phase that has been termed the Third Wave. But the long trends, he argues, are nothing like so uniform as Tocqueville, for example, would have expected: "It is only legitimate to speak of 'a long-term progressive evolution of human political institutions in the direction of liberal democracy' if by 'long-term' we mean 26 years." Do democracy and economic progress go together, as optimists would say? The English-speaking case seems good—except that it was built on cousin wars. Prosperity and democracy, Ferguson concludes, are not mutually causative. On the contrary, it is law and religion that determine both how much we can earn and how freely we are allowed to speak and vote. Nationalism was not the cause of nations—great power politics was. Ethnic conflict ensued. International organizations intended to mediate ethnic conflict are small and weak.

One remains in the dark as to why recent developments justify pessimism in the long term. A last and least satisfying chapter called "Understretch: The Limits of Economic Power" asks: "Why is the United States so powerful? Why is the United States not more powerful?" The danger Ferguson discerns is not (as Paul Kennedy argued in an earlier and opposite Chicken Little tale) the overstretching of power by rich countries—once Britain, now the United States. Now the danger is understretching. The sky is not falling: the earth is exploding disastrously.

What is clear is that Ferguson wants the United States to do more. Against most non-Marxist scholars who have considered the issue, he argues that the Empire was a jolly good thing for the British economy once upon a time, and that British leadership in the nine-

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teenth century was good for peace. Though little in the earlier chapters justifies it, the book's conclusion is: Come on, you Yanks. (One recalls *The Economist* during Vietnam, pouring petrol on the flames.) "The British experience of strategic vulnerability through understretch" is relevant, Ferguson avers, to the United States today. "Far from retreating like some giant snail behind an electronic shell [that is, the Strategic Defense Initiative, Star Wars], the US should be devoting a larger percentage of its vast resources to making the world safe for capitalism and democracy. This book has tried to show that these are not naturally occurring, but require strong international foundations of law and order." Law and religion, remember, not freedoms, made us rich. Ferguson's is an imperialism worthy of Kipling.

Ferguson simply cannot bear the laissez-faire optimism of a book like Thomas Friedman's recent *The Lexus and the Olive Tree. The Cash Nexus* is an extended complaint against a sunny "liberal theory," the view that things are getting better and better on their own, with little help from deep thinkers at the National War College or the London School of Economics. Says our Ferguson, with increasing fervor and diminishing evidence as the book hustles to its end: You say the polity and the economy improve together? What optimistic dream have you been living for the past three centuries?

But optimists like Friedman (Thomas, or for that matter Milton) have been right. In 1830 Macaulay—another historian *wunderkind,* but with a cooler eye—taunted his own generation's pessimists:

> We cannot absolutely prove that those are in error who tell us that society has reached a turning point, that we have seen our best days. But so said all who came before us, and with just as much apparent reason. . . . On what principle is it that, when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?

To which Ferguson replies, again: Who says we see nothing but improvement behind us, especially since America has dropped the reins once so brilliantly held by Great Britain?

I do, and so do most economists. Surprisingly, for someone fluent in economic matters, Ferguson nowhere gives long-run optimism its economic due: namely, that since the eighteenth century, income per head under capitalism has risen astoundingly. Ferguson's book is full of statistical facts. But never does he reveal the most important statistical fact of recent centuries, well represented by U.S. figures. From 1820 to 1994, the inflation-corrected per capita income of the United States increased by sixteen hundred percent, or a factor of seventeen. In 1820 the average American, slave and free, produced $1,290, expressed in 1990 dollars—a little below the present-day average for Africa. In 1995 he or she earned $22,500. You can say all you wish about the sick hurry of modern life (though in fact leisure and retirement were invented in the past century) and the blurring of the sunset in Los Angeles (though in fact the environment has markedly improved in the past half-century: city air is cleaner even in Los Angeles). But the factor of seventeen represents an enormous freeing of people from drudgery, ignorance, fear, and insecurity.

Yet surely, you will argue, the United States is exceptional. Surely the poor elsewhere have been getting poorer. Surely a melancholy economic millenarianism is justified at least by the Third World, yes? No, it is not:

THE WORLD HAS MOVED (1820–1992) FROM A BANGLADESHI LIVING TO A MEXICAN ONE

Year	World GDP/capita in 1990 $s	Comparable country in 1994	World population (in billions)
1820	650	Bangladesh	1.1
1870	900	(less than Africa)	1.3
1913	1,500	Pakistan	1.8
1950	2,100	Philippines	2.5
1992	5,100	Mexico	5.4

Source: A. Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy, 1820–1992,* pp. 228, 194-206, 226.

This is a very good thing, to rise from the level of desperation to the level of hope. Notice the acceleration (which has ramped up in the past ten years)—except for 1913–1950, that era of deglobalization, of protection, of foreign policy governed by notions of economic mercantilism favored by Ferguson, and of the wars that come from the rivalrous pursuit of *lebensraum* and the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (the

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politics, as Thomas Friedman puts it, of quarreling over the ownership of an ancient olive tree instead of cooperating internationally to make soybeans or a Lexus car).

Britain, the first industrial nation and the champion of free trade, went from $1,800 in per capita income in 1820 to $3,300 in 1870, the figure nearly doubling despite a population explosion—and during the half century in which the European avant-garde, with Marx and Engels, turned against free markets. Now Britain wobbles upward in income level alongside other advanced industrial countries—excepting the United States, that continent-wide free-trade zone, which persists at 30 percent above the rest. So much for economic "failure" among the English-speaking leaders of industrialization. Japan in 1870 was roughly at the present-day Bangladeshi level of income per head; by 1994 it had attained U.S. income levels of ten years before. It was a convergence through imitation, saving, education, work—which its former colony South Korea went on to imitate. Korea's income in 1952 was a desperate $860 in 1990 dollars. Now the capitalist part of it earns $10,000 per capita.

Contrary to Ferguson's elusive pessimism, there is no reason why India cannot in five or ten decades achieve an American standard of living. China is doing it. The twenty-first century can become a grand alternative to the just-concluded century of mass slaughter in the name of nationalism and socialism. We see people voting with their feet to escape from some village elder's idea of how to live, or some arts graduate's idea of protecting primitive folkways. For myself I think it unlikely that governments can stop globalization. For which great thanks unto the Lord.

So too Macaulay:

> If we were to prophesy [now in 1830] that in the year 1930 a population of fifty million [it proved to be only a little less], better fed, clad, and lodged than the English of our time [by a factor of about six or seven by 1930], will cover these islands . . . that machines constructed on principles yet undiscovered will be in every house. . . many people would think us insane.

Insanely optimistic, but correct.

The Scholar as Hero

PEIRESC'S EUROPE: LEARNING AND VIRTUE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
By Peter N. Miller. Yale University Press. $40.

Reviewed by TAMARA GRIGGS

No one who has read *Middlemarch* is apt to forget George Eliot's portrait of the learned Mr. Casaubon, that "bat of erudition," as she put it. Eliot created the perfect antithesis of the Romantic ideal in this phlegmatic cleric who arranges his documents in pigeonholes and turns his passionate wife into an amanuensis. Not only is Casaubon's immense research project, *The Key to All Mythologies,* obsolete as a piece of scholarship, but its encyclopedic ambitions also reflect his impoverished imagination; he prefers an alphabetical catalog to the inspired mess of moral life. Doomed to a series of unhappy antitheses, he is "scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted." Added to his moral failings are unpleasant social habits. At dinner, Casaubon scrapes his soup spoon against the bowl and blinks before he speaks.

By the nineteenth century, the independent scholar-collector was seen as the personification of loneliness and irrelevance. Even before the scholarship of German universities rendered his work out of date, "antiquary" had become synonymous with the myopic study of dead things. If we push back into the early decades of the seventeenth century, however, we find that the antiquary was still a vital figure, eliciting respect rather than sly humor. In the fragile peace after the wars of religion, he kept pace with the giants of the New Science, perfected the art of conversation, and provided crucial evidence to serve the political needs of his day. Not only was he once useful, but he was sociable as well. Aristotle wrote, "A lack of converse spells the end of friendship," and seventeenth-

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century antiquaries agreed. The Republic of Letters thrived on steady communion, and its citizens eased the isolation of geographic distance with an uninterrupted exchange of spirited opinions and book reviews.

Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637) was a French lawyer and antiquary who turned his provincial home in Aix-en-Provence into a vibrant center of scholarly research and correspondence. Peiresc was a student of history who didn't write books, a researcher who didn't offer synthetic judgments, and a collector who valued humble and broken objects over merely beautiful ones. Unlike modern scholars, Peiresc studied everything, from natural phenomena to ancient artifacts. He drew sensible conclusions from observing the metamorphosis of a butterfly, and traced the history of the ancient Samaritans. He collected fossils, Roman coins, and Coptic manuscripts sent by merchants from the Ottoman East. His interests ranged from the universal to the local, from astronomy to the regional history of Provence.

It was Peiresc's allegiance to the world of observable things that endeared him to his seventeenth-century biographer, Pierre Gassendi, for whom experiment, precise observation, and detached reporting were the most virtuous of activities. Peiresc is not remembered today, yet he was held up as a model of virtue in his own time, his life transformed by Gassendi into an exemplary narrative. As moderns, we tend to associate individual excellence with the judgment of posterity, but as Peter Miller warns, "to focus on those whose fame has endured, or even grown, in the intervening centuries is to make Fortuna, and not Clio, the muse of history." Miller's deeply erudite work attempts to resurrect Peiresc, and along with him an entire culture. The book is not a biography. Rather, Miller sets out to explore that fleeting Golden Age of learning when scholars were moral heroes. Making wonderful use of Gassendi's biography, he shows how this contemporary promotion of Peiresc and his virtues tells us something about the value of learning in an earlier age.

Peiresc's generation was profoundly influenced by the moral writings of Seneca, and by Stoic philosophy more generally. "Strength of mind, self-control, and patience, all virtues that had been extolled through other sources, like the Church, over previous centuries, were now brought together in a sparkling pagan package that war-weary aristocrats could not seem to get enough of." Although traces of this neo-Stoicism become harder to detect in the following centuries, Peiresc's life reminds us that the Western archetype of the learned man still owes a great deal to this earlier generation's reworking of ancient Roman philosophy.

Miller's extended exploration of neo-Stoic philosophy answers in part a larger question about the antiquary's motives. Even in an age of heroic scholars, Gassendi had to defend Peiresc's learning against criticism by those who distrusted his meticulous examination of musty documents and cracked inscriptions. Why did antiquaries throw themselves into the study of these broken materials of the past? One answer is that antiquarian research proved politically useful. In a period when the authority of constitutional politics relied on archival documentation, antiquaries could offer their services to the state. Peiresc's research into the history of provincial parliaments and his own position as a magistrate made him sensitive to the political uses of legal scholarship. Yet he was not a radical advocate for reform.

Although they benefited from the public value of scholarship, antiquaries like Peiresc turned to the study of documents and artifacts for more personal reasons. The full recovery of the past was often felt to be a moral obligation, and by engaging with other centuries and other lands, the scholar could achieve a consoling grasp of his place within the larger universe. The athletic training of the mind, which prepared him to make reasoned and ethical public judgments, was also a private pleasure. Attention to detail, reverence for the past, and suspension of judgment: these were all ideals of antiquarian learning. In his celebration of Peiresc, Miller rarely challenges these ideals. Nor does he compare Peiresc with other antiquaries who may not have accepted the austere ethics of neo-Stoicism.

Nevertheless, Miller's focus on Peiresc's circle allows him to draw out the singularity of antiquarian culture. The world Miller describes is almost exclusively male. The ties binding late Renaissance antiquaries—moral conversation and brotherly affection—have their ori-

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gin in monastic life. But Peiresc and his contemporaries broke new ground in developing an erudite culture outside the boundaries of the monastery, and also away from the aristocratic court. Unlike Baldassare Castiglione, whose ideal courtier had to tailor his intellectual pursuits to the demands of an unlearned audience, antiquaries sought out their peers as interlocutors. For Peiresc, the learned life precluded marriage. When Miller describes the antiquary's philosophical struggle against time, one wonders if it was this "lay monasticism" and not external fortune that threatened his scholarship's fate in posterity. We do not know how many documents and artifacts in Peiresc's collection were lost or destroyed after his death. Perhaps if he had been fruitful and multiplied, his heirs might have preserved his full legacy.

Miller acknowledges the instability—and even the unattractiveness—of this autonomous learning. Yet he offers a nostalgic account of its demise. From the accommodating courtiers of the Renaissance, to the stoical and independent antiquaries of the baroque age, to the polite salon-goers of the Enlightenment, the very notion of civilized life changed. Peiresc's erudite universe of men ultimately yielded to a world of cultivated drawing rooms where men and women mingled, but where politics and pedantry were outlawed. The connection between affective discourse and exhaustive learning dissolved. What endured, Miller argues, was "the 'momentum' of the practice but not its meaning: constancy without self-mastery, conversation without improvement, and friendship without philosophy."

Miller's study skillfully oscillates between wider historical reflections and a detailed examination of the antiquary as a political, social, and moral figure. Still, it is a pity that there is not more of Peiresc himself in these pages. Unlike Galileo or Hobbes, whose writings have become part of the canon, the forgotten antiquary must be brought to life through his unpublished notes and scattered letters. Perhaps Peiresc was a frustrating quarry. As Miller acknowledges, despite thousands of pages of extant notes and letters, "we do not possess any extended reflection by Peiresc on why he did what he did." In his elucidation of the theological and philosophical motives of the silent antiquary, Miller makes ingenious use of the testimony of surrogates: a Dutch natural law theorist, a Silesian poet, and an Italian Jesuit missionary to China. Unfortunately, these charismatic individuals threaten to eclipse Peiresc. In his conclusion, Miller mentions that his next book will be devoted exclusively to Peiresc's scholarship, so perhaps we will have to wait for the entire story of this fascinating figure.

Much of Miller's detailed work will be of interest only to specialists of early modern Europe, but the lessons he draws from his study of the antiquary's social role deserve a wider audience. His ability to reinsert the seventeenth-century scholar and his world back into the history of "civil society" allows us to see how our own ideas about citizenship and the public sphere emerged from this austere and learned world. Besides making their contribution to later notions of secular politics and civic life, seventeenth-century antiquaries firmly coupled moral goodness with deep learning. Although the *philosophes* and later the Romantics denied the moral value of their learning, Miller invites us to consider that the last word is not necessarily the best.

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Soft Exoticism

TINKERING WITH EDEN:
A NATURAL HISTORY OF EXOTICS
IN AMERICA
By Kim Todd. W. W. Norton. $26.95.

Reviewed by CHRIS MOONEY

In 1858, the poet William Cullen Bryant spent an inspiring evening at the New York home of Eugene Schieffelin, best remembered today as the anglophile eccentric who in 1890 would release cagefuls of European starlings into Central Park. At the time—in a kind of dress rehearsal for future mayhem—Schieffelin had just set loose a flock of English house sparrows. Bryant penned a joyous ode to commemorate the occasion, "The Old-World Sparrow," which began:

> We hear the note of a stranger bird,
> That ne'er till now in our land was heard:
> A winged settler has taken his place
> With Teutons and men of the Celtic race.
> He has followed their path to our hemisphere—
> The Old-World sparrow at last is here.

It took just two decades for Bryant's lofty cadences to become the butt of jokes. In 1881, the obnoxious proliferation of house sparrows led one sporting-magazine correspondent to offer up a piece of doggerel titled "The Old World Nuisance":

> He defiles our porches, there's no denying that;
> He has ruined my wife's dress and soiled
> my best hat.
> He hangs round the bird cage to pilfer the seed,
> And gives the canary a foul insect breed.
> He never eats worms, let us tell it abroad,
> This Old World sparrow is a terrible fraud.

The author of the second verse was Fred Mather, a pisciculturist with the U.S. Fish Commission and frequent columnist for the magazine *Forest and Stream.* Ironically, just a few years after parodying Bryant's verse, Mather would commit his own brazen act of ecological imperialism: he engineered the introduction of the German brown trout into America's streams. Fly-fisherman today adore him for it, and unlike the starling, the trout has not proved an environmental disaster. Still, was Mather a hypocrite for mocking those who optimistically introduced European species, and then introducing one himself? Or was he, both as scientist and satirist, carefully evaluating exotics on a case-by-case basis?

These are the kinds of questions raised by Kim Todd's eminently readable *Tinkering with Eden: A Natural History of Exotics in America,* which takes as its subject matter the varied and often dubious motives of the humans responsible for the introduction of species to the continent. The book unfolds as a chronological assemblage of narrative historical vignettes; often, in the absence of a precise record of events, Todd allows herself to imagine how a certain animal escaped, or what drove a particular individual to change the course of American ecological history. She devotes chapters to Mather and the trout, and to Schieffelin and the starling (he wanted the New World to contain all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare). We also encounter, among others, Edward Avery McIlhenny, the Louisiana Tabasco tycoon and exotics enthusiast whose South American nutria escaped from their pen during a storm and invaded the swampland; Leopold Trouvelot, the Harvard astrophysicist who accidentally loosed the swarming gypsy moth while trying to breed a "better" silkworm; and Sheldon Jackson, the missionary ("words like 'zeal' come to mind") who dreamed that importing reindeer from the Siberian tundra to Alaska would help transform the Eskimos into civilized, Christian herdsmen.

Tinkering with Eden begs to be judged on the strength of its prose, and Todd is certainly an engaging writer. "Words on the Wing," her chapter on the starling, was published separately and is probably the most perfect set piece in the book. Her account of the introduction of the pigeon, or domesticated rock dove, is also memorable. It begins with the story of the

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bird's transportation to the New World by seventeenth-century French colonists aboard the *Jonas;* they arrive in Nova Scotia and immediately run into another French group led by the explorer Samuel de Champlain. "Champlain didn't mention the pigeons in his extensive records, but then, he didn't mention his wife either," Todd observes. Making sure to situate each species in its cultural context, she explains how pigeons, once prized by obsessive and rich European fanciers, morphed into scavenging nuisances in their new American setting: "Essentially the colonists brought doves to the New World and ended up surrounded by pigeons."

Previous discussions of exotics in the Americas have, not surprisingly, emphasized *Guns, Germs, and Steel*-esque themes of European biological imperialism. Todd seems comfortable with, but not particularly invested in, that side of the story. Though her book's grounding in science and history is (for the most part) solid, her objectives are more literary than scholarly. Then, too, as its title suggests, *Tinkering with Eden* carries a prescriptive message. The book reads as a kind of morality tale, a rhetorically powerful indictment of hubristic acts of ecological destruction by well-intentioned but misguided humans set on altering their surroundings. Mad scientist types flit through Todd's text, as do loonies like Schieffelin and megalomaniacs like Sheldon Jackson. In closing, in a moment of humane humor, Todd lets her imagination dwell on what might have been the most bizarre experiment in species introduction ever, a nightmare scenario that thankfully never materialized: the release of the kangaroo on the plains of the American Midwest. Lest you think no one could be so crazy, the scheme was nearly implemented by Robert C. Auld, a nineteenth-century cattle breeder, who felt that after the demise of the buffalo, the plains required the presence of another "large ruminant."

Kim Todd situates herself in many of the landscapes she describes, and clearly revels in being there—as befits an employee of the Sierra Club. And in its tacit assumptions, *Tinkering with Eden* addresses itself to a like-minded, environmentalist audience. Perhaps for this reason, Todd fails to qualify and develop her case against "tinkering," which unfortunately leaves her open to being stereotyped as a gushy green. A conservative thinker like Peter Huber, author of the recent *Hard Green: Saving the Environment from Environmentalists,* would have a field day with the "soft" Todd, particularly with her use of literary flourish and occasional innuendo rather than rigorous argument. Of his own brand of "hard" environmentalism, Huber writes, "when we have to choose, as we sometimes must, we put people first." Presumably he would support the introduction of exotics in some cases; probably he would say that Fred Mather was right to introduce the German brown trout to American streams, given the sporting benefits and lack of clear environmental damage, but would see little justification for the starling or English sparrow. The question is, would Kim Todd capitulate to this logic? And if not, how would she challenge it? *Tinkering with Eden* offers no clear theoretical framework from which to approach such questions.

In this respect, Todd's chapter on biological control—the introduction of benign exotics to battle marauding species—deserves particular attention. Biocontrol stands as perhaps the canonical example of studious and careful "tinkering" in the interest of countering environmental damage caused by pests. The late-nineteenth-century proponents of this approach, notably the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Charles Valentine Riley and Alfred Koebele, did their best to apply a scientific understanding of ecosystems and evolution to problems created by exotic species run wild. In a chapter titled "The Bug Hunters," Todd describes Koebele's expedition to Australia to find the perfect biological foe of the cottony cushion scale, a pest that was destroying California's orange orchards. He returned with a species of ladybug known at the time as *Vedalia cardinalis,* which devoured the scales and saved the trees. It was, one might say, a resounding victory for science.

Todd's verdict on this sort of informed ecological manipulation is puzzling. Clearly, she prefers the practice of biocontrol to the use of insecticides. But she also notes ominously that once *Vedalia* proved successful, people wanted ladybugs to battle every pest that came along, and cited the success of *Vedalia* to justify the introduction of other, less desirable species. It's hard to see how this discredits biocontrol: Riley and Koebele were the leading critics of

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those who would abuse their methods. Nevertheless, when Todd writes that "some biologists still carried around the well-worn *Vedalia* story like good-luck stones in their pockets," we are meant to consider these scientists as somehow shamanistic, foolishly trusting in perilous practices. Todd never makes a strong case—indeed, she never makes any case—against the cautious and ecologically informed introduction of particular species in particular situations. Yet she often writes as though she has done just that. The underlying sentiment is a general distrust of those who would make any alteration whatsoever to "nature," an attitude for which Todd offers no real justification.

These would be minor criticisms, were it not for their resonance with a highly misleading statement that Todd makes at the end of *Tinkering with Eden*. Drawing a connection between the haphazard introduction of exotic species and new technologies, she cites a well-known Cornell University study of the environmental side effects of genetically engineered Bt corn—which, she says, "killed the caterpillars of monarch butterflies that fed on milkweed leaves sprinkled with pollen from the improved corn." Although environmental activists have made a huge ruckus over Bt corn, the Cornell study did not replicate conditions in the wild, and its author warned explicitly that his work should not be misinterpreted. In fact, the laboratory pollen doses were many times higher than in nature; so far it's hard to see any damaging effects of the corn on monarchs in field conditions.

In his introduction to the 2000 edition of *The Best American Science & Nature Writing,* David Quammen criticizes nature writing that abandons scientific rigor: "We need the self-identified lovers of nature to maintain an edge of critical intelligence." In *Tinkering with Eden,* Kim Todd almost entirely eschews the kind of purple passages that Quammen denounces as "ethereal tripe." Nevertheless, as a writer she appeals largely to our feelings rather than to our minds. Because Todd writes so well, *Tinkering with Eden* is a powerful and persuasive book. It is all the more important, then, that she carefully consider the implicit messages she is delivering—and the way they affirm, rather than seriously challenge, the tacit assumptions of devout environmentalists.

The Elusive Gods

LITERATURE AND THE GODS
By Roberto Calasso, translated by Tim Parks.
Knopf. $22.

Reviewed by RACHEL HADAS

Literature and the Gods could have been an enchanting little book. Roberto Calasso's reading is wide, his topic tantalizing; he seems able to enter into the mood of a writer or a whole epoch with a wry, sympathetic wriggle. These attractive qualities are offset, alas, by the overly sinuous, labyrinthine structure of a discussion that is hard to follow from one sentence to the next, let alone from paragraph to paragraph (paragraphs are scarce in these pages anyway). Somewhere in the middle of the book, one loses the will to contend with false starts and dead ends; Calasso seems increasingly unlikely to deliver on the promise of his title. At best, *Literature and the Gods* provides glimpses and questions; it gives few answers.

The topic here is something like the role of Greek mythology in European literature from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth—though since Calasso's attitude toward dates is that they're a "useful superstition," we are often left floating in a zone of synchronicity. Calasso, who heads his own Milan publishing house, scorns surveys even more than dates, declaring at the outset that "it would be a dull business indeed just to list the times the Greek gods turn up in modern poetry from the early Romantics on." Avoiding such superstition and dullness, his study sweeps willfully and idiosyncratically from Nabokov to Leopardi or Hölderlin to Lautréamont. There are wonderful quotes in abundance, many insights, and even more provocative questions; but of sustained and coherent argument there is precious little.

As with Calasso's earlier and more successful book *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* the

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lack of an index in *Literature and the Gods* makes it needlessly difficult to track down a passage or reference. In lieu of an index for both books, we get a list of sources (not the same thing), to which no footnotes direct us, so that we're forever flipping back and forth. Nor is any translator listed, though all the passages are translated. Does Calasso translate German, French, and English passages into Italian, and are these then retranslated by Tim Parks? I haven't a clue.

A subtler problem common to both books is what might be called the permeability of Calasso's relation to his sources. A translation or paraphrase is always liable to change its spots and turn into commentary. Thus it can be hard to tell what Calasso thinks of a given passage, especially since some of his proof texts (Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Lautréamont) are hardly transparent.

This book began as lectures, and its offhand allusiveness is suited to that genre. Lecturers can get away with numerous rhetorical questions, references to poems they do not go on to quote, and the general salad toss of cultural allusions that characterizes *Literature and the Gods*. All the same, these must have been bewildering lectures to sit through. Some visual aids would have helped. I doubt if Calasso has any use for time lines, but his love for painting, and the following passage, make me hope there were at least slides:

> Thanks to its wordless nature, which allows it to be immoral without coming out and saying as much, the painted image was able to restore the gods to their glamorous and terrifying apparitions as simulacra. . . . For almost four centuries these were our gods: shining out from picture galleries, parks, private studies. So that if we were to take away the representations of the pagan gods from the paintings of the fifteenth century through to the end of the eighteenth, we would create a vortex that would draw a great deal else down with it, and the development of art in those centuries would seem disconnected and schizoid.

Does Calasso hear himself here? His own study may not be schizoid, but it is certainly disconnected. His book is, in fact, a kind of museum guide to a series of moments or personalities in literary history—a rather discontinuous series whose disparate elements we are left to connect however we can.

And the connection I kept wanting to make was postmodernism. Calasso never uses the term, and even tends to avoid "irony," though he uses "parody" (quoting Nietzsche, among others). But the sense of learned unseriousness, of proliferating allusions used with bitterly humorous intent, becomes overwhelming. When Calasso cites Baudelaire's anecdote about an intellectual toasting the god Pan at an 1848 dinner party, it becomes equally hard to discern the tone of the toast and of the poet's response. Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Hölderlin, late Nietzsche: all are concerned with the presence or absence of the gods, but all write with a charged irony, whether vatic or feline or just opaque, which makes it very difficult to draw larger conclusions from their visions. Calasso is certainly attracted to these figures, but his mode is often to draw our attention to a passage and then to throw up his hands at its ambiguity.

This habit is the more frustrating because an important topic the book flirts with and skirts seems to be the question my mythology students ask most often: Did the Greeks (and those who came after them) believe in their gods? No doubt there is no one simple answer; certainly Calasso doesn't provide any. Calasso is full of stimulating, often reiterated questions he doesn't answer—"But where did it all begin?" in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony;* or, earlier in this volume, "But how does a god make himself manifest?" A question such as the following, however, gives the flavor of Calasso's maddening vagueness: "What is this 'Junonic Western sobriety' [the phrase is Hölderlin's] that is our natural heritage—and as such the most difficult of characteristics to identify . . . ? Hölderlin doesn't say."

Calasso's final chapter, "Absolute Literature," begins with a wonderful question, perhaps the central node of this book: "What are writers talking about when they name the gods?" It hasn't been answered in the previous seven chapters, nor is it answered here. Instead, it's followed by a quote from Jung—"the gods have become diseases"—which is in turn followed by a riff of speculation, very elegant and suggestive, very inconclusive. The way to read this book is to

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extract questions and quotations and make of them what one will.

Calasso's haughty disdain for mere lists or dates reminds me of the late Northrop Frye's reluctance to teach a course based on biblical allusion alone. But Frye, another widely read and broadly ranging thinker, managed to make his ideas schematic, almost palpable, by the clarity of his prose and an overriding sense of theme. Like Calasso, Frye was fond of pulling quotations from his prodigious memory and reading to illustrate his large ideas; unlike Calasso, he never merged into the quote and rode off on the resulting tangent. Frye's ideas about literary modes and biblical symbolism remain accessible: easy to remember or teach or apply whether or not you agree with them. It isn't clear that Calasso has any ideas; what he offers is curiosity, a temperament, an atmosphere. "*Literature and the Gods* is, in itself, a literary masterpiece," reads the jacket copy. Maybe that's the trouble.

You Want Fries with That?

FAST FOOD NATION: THE DARK SIDE OF THE ALL-AMERICAN MEAL
By Eric Schlosser. Houghton Mifflin. $25.

Reviewed by ANDREY SLIVKA

Early in *Fast Food Nation,* Eric Schlosser's exposé of the fast-food industry, there's a remarkable little passage. Schlosser is in Anaheim, California, talking to Carl N. Karcher, the elderly millionaire responsible for the Carl's Jr. chain of hamburger restaurants, and one of the men who presided over Anaheim's transformation from an orange-growing center into a typical American strip suburb:

> I looked out the window and asked him how he felt driving through Anaheim today, with its fast food restaurants, subdivisions, and strip malls. "Well, to be frank about it," he said, "I couldn't be happier." Thinking that he'd misunderstood the question, I rephrased it, asking if he ever missed the old Anaheim, the ranches and citrus groves.
>
> "No," he answered. "I believe in Progress."

This is remarkable. The wasteful and what would seem to be self-evidently tawdry geography that's characteristic of the fast-food industry—of our fast-food culture—has become, like the family farm before it, the favored, sentimentalized, moralized geography of American "Progress," of the American Way.

That's only one of many powerful passages in Schlosser's eviscerating examination of a fast-food industry that, while aggressively and successfully defining itself as the incarnation of the best ideals of American civilization, is in fact a threat to it, whether the industry is brutalizing its laborers, poisoning consumers with meat-borne pathogens, pressuring the government, harassing competitors, or corrupting the environment. The author, an *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent, is concerned with the fast-food complex in its totality, from A to Z: from the eerily efficient way the french-fry potatoes are grown and processed by huge, superrationalized agribusiness firms to the effect a hamburger has on its consumer's health.

The fast-food industry wasn't born into the objectionable state in which Schlosser finds it. The entrepreneurs who established it tended to be self-created men, outsiders, struggling and tenacious American dreamers, whom it would be difficult to imagine heading operations today. Richard and Maurice McDonald's picaresque career arc was typical of the founding fathers. New Hampshire-bred young men who followed the Depression-era migration to California, the McDonalds worked in Hollywood as set-builders, opened an unsuccessful movie theater in Glendale, watched it fail, and opened a Pasadena drive-in restaurant in 1937. Finally, in 1948, they devised the assembly-line-style Speedee Service System of food preparation that would change the food-service business and, eventually, the world.

The industry's early history, then, unfolds in an ambiance of mid-century optimism and exuberance, as a handful of American originals, slaving at their hamburger stands, create a way of eating consistent with a new way of living—

Andrey Slivka is Associate Editor at the *New York Press,* a New York City weekly newspaper.

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particularly with a new way of youthful living in California's nascent car culture (burgers were easy to eat behind the wheel). What changed? How did an industry that expressed something admirable about our culture, its fluidity and freedom, become a liability to it? Schlosser doesn't trace the industry's development throughout the decades—*Fast Food Nation* isn't exactly a history, it's an indictment. But it didn't take long. Soon enough, the idea of American civilization, of American cultural might, was inextricable from the idea of fast food, just as it was inextricable from the Walt Disney company, another organization whose claim to embody a certain wholesome, cheerful Americanism obscured a tendency toward union busting and other forms of big-money viciousness.

Schlosser has carried off some incredible feats of reporting: *Fast Food Nation* is one of those rare works that are at once painstakingly detailed and readable. His evocation of the slaughterhouses in which fast-food hamburgers begin their lives is infernal. These are High Plains necropoli in which often illiterate workers bearing deadly knives and hyped on methamphetamines wade through stinking offal, lacerating themselves and each other as they work to keep up with a brutal assembly-line pace, stumbling into machines that can rip off their limbs. Meatpacking workers tend to be the most vulnerable of the vulnerable: mostly nonunionized, mostly poor white and Mexican, often undocumented, easy prey for a meatpacking industry that doesn't shy away from intimidation. Equally forceful is Schlosser's relentless exposé of the fast-food industry's role in spreading beef-borne pathogens—particularly the deadly E. coli 0157:H7—and its attempts to skirt government oversight, which have been so successful that, thanks to the meatpacking industry's allies in Congress, there currently exists no mechanism for the Department of Agriculture to recall deadly meat.

Schlosser's prescriptions for ameliorating and contesting the influence of the fast-food industry are traditionally liberal: stronger unions, more government control, resistance against the Republican politicians who tend to enable the fast-food machine, and so on. But in a tantalizing way, the book points beyond the restraints of liberalism. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Fast Food Nation* is how it evokes

FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. As borne out by critical analysis, the New Testament Gospels are sloppy history, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Frankly, most Christians seem not to care--transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom accurate history matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides. It consists of 113 notes taken down by a disciple of things he heard Jesus say that perplexed him. Thus the notes probably have not suffered alteration and were written down at the time heard--the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. He provides all the text of *Thomas* with comments and Marcan context, thereby retrieving a narrative of Jesus that is tenably historical.

This ***historical*** Jesus based his teaching on the Epicurean philosophy, not on Judaism with its fasting, praying, almsgiving, and obeying food laws. This ***historical*** Jesus said, "Tell no lie and never do what you hate." This ***historical*** Jesus never mentioned a devil, demons, or hell. Epicureanism also shaped Jesus' thought that God and Caesar are man-made authorities and that one's ultimate authority should be oneself.

Hannah's book is 321 pgs., pbk., $12 postpaid. Please order by check or money order from:

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the fast-food industry's devastating effect on the land: its role in creating the wasteful low-density-sprawl landscapes that increasingly characterize our culture—to the delight of Carl Karcher, perhaps, but to the perturbation of others. The nation's corporate interests are by now decades into a radical process of converting our geography into environments more amenable to their growth and hegemony—the subdivision environments that increasingly dominate the American experience. The fast-food industry, as Schlosser notes, is the avant-garde of this geographical revolution.

It seems unlikely that liberalism will be adequate to the task of reclaiming physical reality from the corporations and their government enablers. Obviously, Schlosser's prescriptions are useful insofar as they might relieve the day-to-day miseries of meatpacking employees. But if the destructive forces that he expertly describes are to be checked, it's possible that we'll need a third way. Neither a liberalism that, in its obsession with legalism, lawyering, micromanaged rights, and process, is just another expression of the same aggression and technocracy that the fast-food corporations represent, nor the decadent, exploitative politics of the Republican Party's mainstream. A more effective resistance to the fast-food industry might ultimately be conservative in a literal sense. What's required is a willingness to live within natural borders; a respect for the sanctity of landscapes and the creatures that inhabit them, for their inherent value apart from what pennies an economy can squeeze out of them; a willingness to accept and live not only by natural limits, but also according to a sense of what is reasonable, decent.

It's no great surprise that Schlosser chooses Colorado Springs as the geographical center of the book: it's the city whose fast-food culture he most deeply analyzes, whose fast-food restaurant managers and workers he gets to know best. This is partly because the meatpacking industry, having long ago abandoned Chicago, is based in the High Plains. But it's also because here it's possible to witness the fast-food industry's traumatic, sprawl-making effect on a mythical landscape: the landscape of the West, specifically where the Great Plains run dead into the Front Range of the Rockies. It's in describing the local culture that's threatened here—the cow-town culture that was dominant before Colorado Springs doubled in size over the last thirty years and L.A.-type sprawl took over—that Schlosser's very powerful. We meet an admirable local rancher who's raising organic beef in defiance of agribusiness; we meet another rancher whom Schlosser befriends and who, incredibly, kills himself in despair at his vanishing prospects as an independent cattleman, leaving behind a wife and two young girls. In other words, we're made aware that fast food—and the culture it represents—does more than abuse workers. It also threatens a civilization that might be worth preserving. It's revolutionary.

One other note. A word is conspicuously absent from the text of *Fast Food Nation.* That word is *Columbine,* and it hangs over the Colorado Springs portions of this book. Is it unfair to say this? Is it absurdly tendentious? I don't think so. Part of what gave the Columbine High School atrocity its awful resonant force was the way its dreamlike violence was a product of the suburban American mundane. It's an atrocity associated with a relatively new, but already definitive, type of American place (or non-place)—that is, with the type of new strip-mall Front Range suburb that Littleton, like Colorado Springs, perfectly typifies. It would be instructive to know to what extent the murders' conditions of possibility were perfected by the stresses that teenagers undergo in a place like Littleton. We've all heard about how the boys were affected by first-person video games. But what about the fact that they couldn't walk into town to buy a bottle of soda? Or that along the Front Range's new strip boulevards, a kid is proscribed by the very geography from even crossing the street?

Whatever pieces it may be missing, *Fast Food Nation* is a valuable tool for coming to terms with a corporate consumerism that's become untenable and unsustainable, that acknowledges no moral or natural limits or restraints, that long ago passed a fulcrum point and has grown all-consuming—a corporate consumerism that, like other arrogant, overweening systems, might eventually eat itself up.

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THE READER REPLIES

LINGUISTICS

Mark Halpern's "The End of Linguistics" (Winter) has a message for all English-speaking people: Do not allow your words to carry inborn prejudices. As Bill Moyers has said, "You are the language you speak."

However, I doubt that the science of linguistics will disappear. Is not all true scientific research "swathed in mystery" to the layman? The findings of such research often become the basis for critical thinking.

Halpern's contemptuous dismissal of the metaphor of language as a living, growing thing sent me back to my master's thesis at Queen's College, New York, in 1963. In it I bounced Morris, Ogden and Richards, and Korzybski off Sapir's *Language* (1921). These "linguisticians" recognized the role of previous language structures in determining its drift through time. As Sapir put it, *language moves down time in a current of its own making.*

It should go without saying, of course, that the speaker has the last word. That is why Halpern's message is important. But then there is Emily Dickinson:

> Where a thought takes one's breath away,
> a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence.

DOROTHY MURRAY
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Halpern elegantly declares "the end of linguistics," after which we can at last acknowledge that language change is not the result of some mysterious, hidden law but rather "something that we bring about ourselves." It is true that the speakers and writers of a language are the ones who change it, but it is also true that the changes to the English language that Halpern finds significant, the ones affecting its sounds and structure, are subtle, slow, elusive. Speakers of English did not wake one day, around the time when Shakespeare was experimenting with "let's kill all the lawyers," and decide, "let's raise all the vowels." Nor did they consciously enact the Great Vowel Shift over the course of several centuries. Yet it is clear that such a shift in the English long vowels took place, forming one of the major distinctions between Middle and Modern English.

Halpern faults linguists for describing such changes and thereby abandoning their duty to regulate the phenomena they study. It is linguists, he implies, who impute the Great Vowel Shift to forces beyond our control, yet permit the misuse of words like *progressive,* certainly something that could be eradicated if we only put our minds to it. Linguistics is no art, for it has defaulted on its potential to critique language, yet Halpern also warns that linguistics cannot be a science, because it gives us no earth-shaking insights, instead focusing on descriptions nobody needs—since we all use language anyway—and abstractions no one can understand. In a way, that comes dangerously close to sounding like science. Surely Halpern would leave physicists to their equations and not require them to regulate the behavior of subatomic particles, or to demonstrate the uncertainty of the electron's position, as Shakespeare did that of Hamlet's ghost, with such unalgebraic phrases as "'tis here," "'tis here," "'tis gone"?

Halpern supports his contention that linguistics is reaching its end by noting that some linguistics departments have been absorbed by other units in the academy—as if the configurations of the academy were as stable as those of the atom. If linguistics departments are evanescing, the next step in his algorithm would seem to be, "let's kill all the linguists." It is clear that significant vowel

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raising is occurring in many American cities today. Is another shift in the offing? If Halpern has his way, there will be no linguists around to chronicle it. There will be only those amateur language experts Halpern refers to as "we, the new usage arbiters," half of whom will oppose vowel raising as ugly, wrong, unetymological, pretentious, slang, or worse yet, French, while the other half, the ones truly opposed to linguistic analysis, will reply, "Vowels? What vowels? We don't need no stinkin' vowels."

DENNIS BARON
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

Mark Halpern's provocative essay left me wondering where the author would have us turn for guidance. To the "best writers of the recent past"? But how shall we know they are the best? Surely not by observing how widely read, cited, and commended they are—after all, that would be merely to look into a mirror. Perhaps by consulting the "critics and teachers with whom we study them," more broadly the "general educated public" whom we expect to become the "new usage arbiters." But how shall we know which of these to trust? By recourse, it would seem, to some sense of shared experience and tradition, the "branch on which one sits." Could that branch, and the collective, historical effort it embodies, possibly be part of a living, growing thing?

The question of how much life to attribute to our institutions may fascinate and divide us, but how can we deny that for the individual the force of the collectivity is felt as something independent of himself?

AMOS ORLOFSKY
New Rochelle, New York

"Someone or something is going to determine the way we speak and write," declares Mark Halpern. "We cannot defer usage decisions while waiting for linguists or anyone else to perform further research." No linguist I know of wastes time doing research to determine how to make "usage decisions." (Most, I suspect, think that we usually don't make conscious decisions of that sort at all.)

Halpern would have us believe that while "deep language change," of interest only to specialists like me, is governed by laws like those of "astronomical science," the "chief modes of modern language change" are always as mercurial and subjective as horoscopes. But that simply is not true. To use an example that I sent to Halpern in 1999, the following forms were considered correct in standard Japanese as late as the 1960s:

		Potential	Passive
kuru	"comes"	*korareru*	*korareru*
taberu	"eats"	*taberareru*	*taberareru*
yomu	"reads"	*yomeru*	*yomareru*

Today, forms like *koreru* and *tabereru* are often heard for the potential. To all appearances, these new forms are just like the "with I"s and "to fully understand"s that the likes of William Safire inveigh against; indeed, his Japanese counterparts sniff at them with equal disdain. But they are just the result of the spread of forms long acceptable in Osaka and related dialects to the Tokyo area. If "deep change" like that can produce outcomes worthy of "correction," how can Halpern be sure that *any* of his ephemeral instances of change aren't due to similar historical causes?

The importance of descriptive works like the *Oxford English Dictionary* is that they bring the large-scale picture of linguistic change into view. Linguistic history, as Halpern says, does not settle prescriptivist arguments, but it does expose the hubris of those who think they can control how languages change. If Safire, Halpern, and other "new usage arbiters" want to wage a Hobbesian language war of all against all, no intelligent linguist stands in their way. Let them fight their way to the highest platform they can, whether the *New York Times* or THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, and crow their linguistic authority. From the perspective of language history—of which we would be ignorant were it not for the science of descriptive linguistics—all their pleadings from tradition, all their rationalizations, all their narcissistic claims to superior taste are, indeed, no better than an astrologer's justification for his horoscopes. There is a place for style in writing, but not for intellectual arrogance.

J. MARSHALL UNGER
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Mark Halpern says, "You groan because he speaks of *running the gauntlet?*" Does Mr. Halpern suggest that the speaker, in his ignorance, meant to say *gamut* instead of *gauntlet?* Well, maybe so and maybe not.

My dictionary defines *gauntlet,* in addition to being a kind of glove, as a double row of men facing each other with weapons with which to strike an individual who is made to run between them—by extension, a cross fire or ordeal. It goes on to cite a number of uses, including *ran the gauntlet of criticism and censure,* and *ran the candidate through a savage gauntlet of technical questions.* My dictionary says it is acceptable to run the *gamut* as well *(gamut* being an entire range or series), citing as an example *ran the gamut from praise to contempt.*

WILLIAM D. CLARKE
Hazel Green, Alabama

Halpern failed to mention the most influential prescriptive mandating of linguistic change: style manuals and copy editors. Over the last decade or two, they have enforced substantial changes in usage, not excluding confusing and irrational ones.

Possibly the worst is mangling the rules on hyphenation, enforcing usage declared to be misuse in both Fowler, *Modern English Usage,* and Follett (Barzun), *Modern American Usage.* Seeking to eliminate hyphens as far as possible, style manuals now demand that readers instantly recognize certain pairs of words as being inevitably linked despite the lack of a hyphen. "Hong Kong supermarket" in lieu of "Hong-Kong supermarket" may not produce difficulties, but what about "Belgrade Hotel lobby"? Is it the lobby of the Belgrade Hotel, or the generic lobby of hotels in Belgrade? On reflection, clearly the former, since Hotel is graced with an initial capital letter; on the other hand, perhaps the capital letter was a typo? Now why make the reader pause on so uninteresting a point? Moreover, such clues as upper case are also becoming more rare, since style manuals have declared war not only on hyphens but on upper-case letters as well. Rarely am I nowadays allowed to refer to happenings in my Department or my University, even though I speak of a quite specific department or university.

Well-established periodicals in the humanities and the sciences are full of style-manual-enforced incorrect hyphenation. In the *New York Times Book Review*: "Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells joined in tissue paper-comb concerts"; the reader is supposed to recognize at once that "tissue paper" is a single expression; and that recognition is supposed to be so firm as to remain unshaken by seeing "paper" and "comb" linked together as though "tissue" were modifying this compound(ed) noun. In *Science* magazine: "lasers capable of both high power and machine gun-fast pulses." Here the meaning remains obscure even after contemplation, for possibly there is a technical category of "fast pulses" that may be in their regularity either machine-gun-like or not machine-gun-like; or, it may just mean pulses as fast as machine guns might make them—which, however, seems unlikely, given that lasers can pulse much faster than machine guns can. *Chemical & Engineering News* had as the genuinely ambiguous title of a short article, "Hazardous freight policy set for Channel Tunnel"; did it refer to a policy for handling hazardous freight or to a critique of the freight policy as being a hazardous one?

Style manuals and copy editors also remove hyphens wholesale to make single words, as though English had become an agglutinative sort of language. *Science* speaks of "gellike" qualities instead of the more easily understood "gel-like." The routine removal of hyphens before "like" becomes even more opaque when the word is broken at the end of a line, yielding (as in one of my writings) "mapli" at the end of one line and "ke" to begin the next. And how many readers would not come up short at "A nodelist is used by a FTS mailer as a phone book," which I came upon in *Gateway Magazine,* a periodical intended not for computer geeks but for the general citizenry that buys PCs? Was I alone in taking some seconds to see that this was not a sophisticated modelist (designer of models) but was just a plain node-list? My local hospital offers a number of lectures at its Birthing Center—one of them on "Preconception Planning," which, on reflection, I decided did not mean planning to have preconceptions. But "pre-conception" planning is banned by style manuals that list "pre" as one of those common prefixes that must not be followed by a hyphen.

I have been struck by the rapidity with

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which style manuals enforce change. Over a period of two decades I have published half-a-dozen books with the same publisher, but never have all the copyediting rules been the same. The mode of citation, the style of the references, the use of upper-case letters, and more have apparently been changed every few years. What has not changed is the illogical "American" usage that mandates quote marks to come after periods and commas, irrespective of whether those periods or commas are in or are not in the cited passage. As a chemist by profession, I found it heartwarming to discover that a quarter-century ago, the American Chemical Society introduced for its publications the rule of what it calls "logical placement" for quote marks: nothing goes inside them that was not in the cited original. There are times, after all, when accuracy may be important—in chemistry if not in literature.

HENRY H. BAUER
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia

Mark Halpern replies: Dorothy Murray expresses general approval of my essay, for which I'm grateful, but rebukes me with quotations from Sapir and Dickinson. Sapir's claim—that language "moves down time in a current of its own making"—is precisely the idea that my essay was most concerned to refute; if Ms. Murray believes Sapir on this point, she radically disagrees with me. Dickinson's line is charming, but it's a plea for breathtaking thoughts, not an excuse for bad English. Offer me a thought that takes my breath away, and I will refrain from offering its author a lesson on syntax or diction. But if the syntax or diction are too muddled, I may not understand the thought well enough to know that it's breathtaking. And if it can be even more breathtakingly expressed by an improvement in syntax or diction, I will honor its author by offering such improvements, as Theobald did to a passage of Shakespeare.

Professor Dennis Baron has misunderstood some of my points. I do not regard the great vowel shifts that English and related languages have undergone as the "significant" changes, at least not for purposes of discussing the current status of linguistics or of good usage. The discovery of those changes, and of similar relationships and rules within languages, was important as the basis for the claim that linguistics was a science—a claim that I think experience has now shown to be false. The changes I find significant for purposes of understanding modern language developments are precisely those that, as I pointed out, linguistics regards as superficial and trivial.

I do not "fault linguists for describing such changes"—that is, changes such as the great vowel shifts. I called those descriptions "triumphs of learning and imagination." I do not accuse linguists of abandoning their "duty to regulate the phenomena they study"—it is one of my main points that linguists have no special authority in deciding questions of usage. Nor would I like to see today's linguistic projects and investigations cancelled; I predicted, with approval, that most of them would continue, but under different disciplinary auspices.

Amos Orlofsky raises a profound issue: where shall we look for authority?—a huge subject on which I hope soon to publish some thoughts. But as a short-term, interim answer, I say, take as guides those who write for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. The fact that we cannot have apodictic knowledge is not a reason to abandon hope or standards. There is indeed a "living, growing thing" involved in language change: it is the human mind, individually and collectively, not some abstraction called "language," much less a phantom called "linguistic laws."

Professor Unger's example of change in the Japanese language seems to me unable to bear the weight he puts upon it. It is precisely the sort of local, minute, superficial change that I contrasted to deep, structural language changes, and merely provides evidence that the four principal modes of language change that I discussed in the first pages of my essay are as operative in Japan as they are in the Western world. And I quite fail to see how the *OED* exposes the "hubris of those who think they can control how the language changes"; Mr. Unger will have to fill in some of the elided steps in his reasoning if I'm to understand that assertion.

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William D. Clarke is mistaken in thinking that I want those who say "run the gauntlet" to say "run the gamut"; what I want them to say—as do the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and usage guides by Eric Partridge, Bergen and Cornelia Evans, and Patricia O'Connor—is "running the gantlet." The *gauntlet* usage is an instance of folk etymology, by which unfamiliar terms are assimilated to the nearest familiar ones. Clarke's references to and quotations from "my dictionary" are most tantalizing; just which dictionary says all those strange things? He makes no reference to the part of my essay in which I discussed the kind and degree of authority that most modern dictionaries possess; I would ask him to look at it again.

IN DEFENSE OF FAINTING

Some footnotes to William Loizeaux's "In Defense of Fainting":

1. Fainting can accompany the cough syndrome, usually exibited in the form of paroxysmal coughing by a heavy smoker at a bar.

2. When army colonels are inspecting troops standing at parade grounds, "at ease" is ordered so leg muscles can be wiggled to prevent fluid pooling, which leads to decreased cardiac output and possibly a manly swoon.

3. Before World War II, *Reader's Digest* reported a railroad engineer who fainted going around curves. His collar was too tight and, as he leaned out the window, he stretched his neck and compressed his carotid sinus. Ergo, a reflex vasovagal faint.

4. Blood-donor faint was once rather common among macho males afraid of needles.

5. I once had a patient who had a typical hyperventilation syndrome because of apprehensions and anxieties. When I asked her whether she ever fainted, she replied, "I can't get away that easily." Here a wished-for faint as a feint, perhaps.

Loizeaux's "your legs go wimbly" rings true to the ear, but the *OED* and my other dictionaries don't define *wimbly*, and *wimble* doesn't fit the sound.

An enjoyable essay.

JOHN H. FELTS, M.D.
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

WIGWAM WORDS

Jill Lepore's "Wigwam Words" was a much-needed antidote to the politically correct nonsense we now read so often about Native Americans. (Doesn't columnist Philonoë realize that her great-great-grandfather's murder was a totally justifiable response to his vicious transgressions against Indian Holy Places?)

RON MAY
Little Rock, Arkansas

Lepore declares that "seventeenth-century [white] observers were almost universally disdainful of Indian speech." Roger Williams was not. Surely his extraordinary glossary of Narragansett expressions, *A Key into the Language of America* (London, 1653), deserves mention. The book not only intended to improve communication between the two nations but was also designed to raise interest back home in Native American culture. Why didn't Lepore balance her account with this acknowledgment?

RICHARD BURWELL
Franconia, New Hampshire

Jill Lepore replies: Roger Williams was indeed a student of both Narragansett culture and language, as Burwell rightly points out. As I have discussed in *The Name of War*, however, Williams's *Key into the Language of America* (actually published in 1643) illustrates just how badly seventeenth-century English colonists communicated with their Indian neighbors; his guidebook includes telling translations for what were apparently handy phrases: "I'll lie not" and "Wee understand not each other." And when Narragansetts destroyed Providence and torched Williams's house in March of 1676, Williams damned them, declaring, "God would help us to Consume them." Williams's respect for his Indian neighbors and their culture was stronger and lasted longer than most New Englanders', but, like his house, it burned to ashes during King Philip's War.

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The Podium

Opium

A. ALVAREZ

Two centuries ago, opium was like aspirin. Every household had some, usually mixed with alcohol in the form of laudanum, and used it as an analgesic for aches and pains, hangovers, toothache, and hysteria. Shelley drank laudanum to calm his nervous headaches, Keats used it as a painkiller, Byron took an opium-based concoction called Kendal Black Drop as a tranquilizer, even Jane Austen's sedate mother prescribed it for travel sickness. (Wordsworth never touched the stuff; more surprisingly, neither did William Blake, the hippies' hero—but then, he was so eccentric that he started where opium left off.)

Opium was classless and cheap, so cheap that factory workers in the earliest "dark satanic mills" swilled laudanum on Saturday nights because it cost less than booze, even in the days of Gin Lane, when you could get "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence." When Marx called religion "the opiate of the masses," the masses would have known what he meant. Naturally, the general availability of opium and the medical profession's enthusiasm for it helped create addicts, some of them very famous: Robert Clive of India, for example, and William Wilberforce, the great emancipator. Among the writer addicts, Coleridge and De Quincey were the best known, but they also included that most sober poet George Crabbe. All of them, however, were addicts not by design but by mistake. At a time when doctors themselves had no concept of addiction, there was nothing to alert their patients to the dangers of the patent medicines they prescribed or to prepare them for the side effects. As a result, there was no more stigma attached to the opium habit than to alcoholism; it was an unfortunate weakness, not a vice.

—from a talk delivered at the Altered States of Consciousness Conference at the New School University in New York, February 23, 2001

A. Alvarez is a British poet and author whose books include *The Savage God, Day of Atonement, Hers,* and *Night*. The complete text of this talk will be published next fall in *Social Research* (vol. 68, no. 3).

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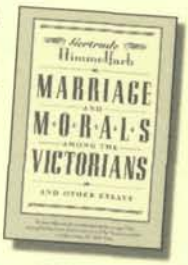

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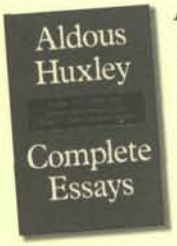

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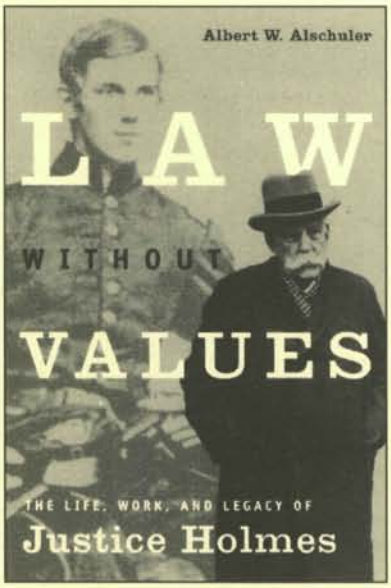

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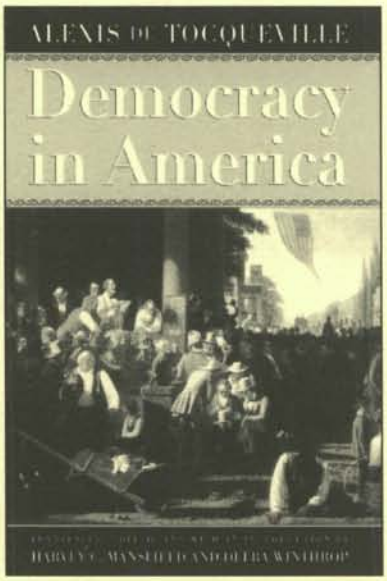

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